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MUSORGSKY.

(From the portrait by REPIN, painted just before the composer's death).

MUSORGSKY

THE RUSSIAN MUSICAL NATIONALIST

BY

M. D. CALVOCORESSI

Translated by

A. EAGLEFIELD HULL,

Mus. Doc. (Oxon.)

WITH MUSICAL ILLUSTRATIONS AND A PORTRAIT

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TO

M. PIERRE AUBRY

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MUSORGSKY

CHAPTER I

Musorgsky's Place in the Russian School

The Russian School resembles no other, either in history or in character. It suddenly blossomed forth in the middle of the nineteenth century, after a germinative period whose history can only be traced back with difficulty, but whose fruit ripened almost as soon as it appeared. Before the school was even fifty years old, it constituted a quite independent, homogeneous and extensive art. The case is so rare as to be at first disconcerting. It is not only the rapidity of growth which astonishes us, but also and especially the general excellence and the distinctive qualities which are common to nearly all the works exemplifying this school.

Nationalism has often been put forward as a drawback to Russian music, and the claim of Glinka, Balakireff and Rimsky-Korsakoff, to have enriched their art-language by the inclusion of folk-songs, has been treated by some critics merely in a humorous light. Others, more modern, are content to compare this strongly tinctured and

idiomatic Russian music with a music "purely human and universal."*

It is not the object of the present volume to discuss these theories. Let it suffice to mention two facts: first, that the nationalist tendency is not confined to a few, but exists amongst all the Russian masters; and secondly, that it has existed from the very moment when Russia first began to produce art-music. The consciousness of a more or less national sentiment expressed in a national style is noticeable even in the music of Kachin, Volkoff, Fomin, and Titoff, in the eighteenth century, forerunners of the school. The cult of national folk-lore, the spirit and style of which are the essential elements of the characteristics of the modern school, is of fairly long standing in Russia. Themes from the folk-songs were incorporated in the operas, as well as in the instrumental pieces produced during the incipient period, just as scenes of country life were represented on the dramatic stage. In 1790, Pratsch published a collection of folk-songs (a very remarkable one for the period) the success of which is proved by the numerous editions.†

In 1792 a *Chansonnier Russe* appeared in Petrograd, and in 1804 Daniloff Kircha published his *Collection of Cossack Songs*. Since then, the movement has continued and steadily increased, with the result that to-day, despite all kinds of diffi-

*For a discussion of Russian National Music, see M.D. Calvocoressi's *La Musique russe* (Paris, 1907. 8vo. pamphlet).

†It was Pratsch's collection from which Beethoven took the Russian themes for his *Rasumovsky String Quartets*. Opus 59.

culties, chiefly due to the immense area over which it extends, Russian musical folk-lore is better studied and nurtured than any other.

The second fact is more decisive. Russia has never produced a single first-class work which does not contain all the characteristics of " nationality." Those Russian musicians, who repudiated the cramping effect of nationality on their creative powers, and who sought to produce by means of individualism, a supreme and universal type of music, have shown no great proofs of originality. They have never used that which was completely their own making, but have been, and are, content to exploit the common ground of the creations of the past ; thus art became for them, alas ! a mere matter of stencil-like accuracy.

An impartial mind can only approve then the strongly nationalist tendency of the group of which Musorgsky formed a part, and of which Glinka was the first great representative.

Glinka's gift to his contemporaries was, first and foremost, the taste for artistic forms ; he showed them the possibilities of popular themes and styles both in the theatre and in the concert room. Dargomisky, after having followed in Glinka's steps in his *The Wood-Nymph* (1856) turned towards a style still more free in manner, and by his *Statue-Guest* and his songs, he became the inaugurator of the modern movement which the so-called " Five "* promoted and continued.

*Borodin, Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Balakireff and Cæsar Cui.

What did this movement mean, and what were the innovations which these Russian masters introduced into music?

The answer is found in their works; their music is distinguishable from all others, more by the characteristic materials than by the spirit which animates it. But to describe these particular features in words is difficult. We can say with certainty that in their works, the melody, the tonality with the harmonic super-structures, the rhythms, are all as free as in the folk-songs themselves—a music which had existed before their age. And the fact that it is impossible to find such a freedom or any equivalent richness in the productions of those modern schools which are further removed from popular art, allows us to recognise the felicitous influence of this folk element. But innovations of a tangible order are few in comparison with the value of the new spirit which the "Five" were the first to assert.

At a certain period of the nineteenth century, music was found to have evolved in an extraordinary manner under the influence of Romanticism: an abstract, idealistic element had entered; something purely intellectual had acquired the right of way. At the same time, pessimism, the religion of suffering (the predominant characteristic of human thought in the nineteenth century) invaded it. Thus music, the most independent art of all, the one which seemed fated to remain always what it was at the time of Bach and Mozart —a harmonious and expressive weaving of sounds—

now appeared destined one day to become chiefly the vehicle of philosophic meditation, and more especially of the meditation on human suffering.

The aim of the Russian masters was to strive against this tendency, to exclude from music all that was symbolic of cerebral elements; and, even for some time, all concession to abstract formalism such as purely rhetorical eloquence. The works of these composers are then the exact opposite of Romanticism. No doubt this was due to the example provided by the instinctive art of the people, and to the persistence of a consciousness which was unsophisticated by academicism and by love of the abstract.

Musorgsky occupies a very special place in the group. He is directly allied in tendencies to Dargomisky, and in some measure to Cæsar Cui. He has scarcely any feature in common with Borodin, Balakireff, or Rimsky-Korsakoff. His musical language, however, has the same origin as theirs; and in this it resembles theirs in several ways. It it does not shew the least trace of Orientalism, it nevertheless contains numerous popular Slav elements. Certain freedoms, certain unprecedented and quite intuitive audacities, and their constant adaptation to the special needs of his own creative temperament, make his art something very exceptional; for though charm is occasionally something of a rarity with him, yet this fact fails to impair the greatness of his music for those who have an open mind.

Musorgsky, by incorporating the folk elements

into his musical language, carried it on to a very profound development. In applying the folk elements to the systemisation of the traditional art he subjected them to no transformation, but disengaged from them their vital forces in full measure whenever these served to manifest his own particular sensibilities. With him, freedom became the occasion for still further freedoms.

The chief peculiarity of his music is that it is never "pure" or "absolute" music; it is not a simple development or a mere spinning of patterns in sound; but it is a music which confines itself almost entirely to the specification of objects, to the reproduction of the rhythm of spoken language, or of actual, physical movement.

This is an unusual role in the art of sounds. Nevertheless, one discovers in this simple style, quite physical in conception, a protest against abstract rhetoric, against formalism, superficiality, and vain redundancy. Thus, although Musorgsky's personality may be peculiar and irreducible to any common measure, he (both by his tendencies, as well as by his style) stands out with great prominence amongst the countrymen of his time, and even amongst his own special musical group.

CHAPTER II

His Life and Character

Modeste Petrovitch Musorgsky was born on March 16th (N.S. March 29th), 1839, in the family homestead in the village of Karevo in the Toropets district of the Pskoff government. His family belonged to the class of small landowners. The district, situated about 400 miles south of Petrograd, in the plains south-west of the plateau of Valday, is a fairly fertile one, with a very mild climate, and is covered by forests, lakes, marshes, rivers and flax fields. It was once a small independent republic; and joined the Russian confederation sometime before the Tatar invasion. In the early mediaeval times, the inhabitants were the *Krivitcy*, a Slav people.

So Musorgsky's life began in the midst of country scenes and rural life, amongst the peasantry who were to become so dear to him; and after having spent the first ten years of his childhood amongst these country people—of whom he took such careful note, recalling so characteristically their passions, sensibilities and moods in his music, and in the words which he put into their mouths—he returned repeatedly to his native village, making

long sojourns there, thoroughly saturating himself with the spirit of the soil, and with the very soul of the people. As his biographer, Stassoff says, " his works reveal a sincerity, a personality which could only belong to an artist born amongst the people, to one who had heard, seen and felt for himself all that he purposed to reproduce." In fact Musorgsky, by the sum total of his productions, remains the singer of the people, a powerful, sincere and unsophisticated singer. On account of this title alone, he deserves to occupy a unique place in musical history. It is by his very ingenuousness that his highly special inventive qualities are best disclosed.

The impressions of his childhood were deep and lasting; for he was exceedingly sensitive. " My nurse," he wrote in an autobiographical sketch which he commenced at Stasoff's request, " taught me nearly the whole of the Russian folk-lore. Sometimes it caused me sleepless nights. The taste for improvising at the piano came to me at a period when I had not the least idea of the principles of playing the instrument."

The first part of this recollection seems to indicate that Musorgsky in his youth was gifted with a very strong imagination; on the other hand, his work reveals him as a simple observer, content to reproduce artistically rather than to create, and thus strangely enough, making use of all his faculties except imagination. Indeed, the instinctive desire merely to translate into music the subjects which were impressed on his mind, is

already in evidence ; later on, he followed no other course.

His musical education began early, his mother, Julie Ivanovna, giving him his first piano lessons ; later on, he studied the piano with a German governess. This plan worked so well (says the autobiography) that at the age of seven, Musorgsky played some of Liszt's lighter compositions, and at nine years old, he played one of Field's grand concertos before an astonished audience at his home. His father, an ardent musician, decided to develop these precocious qualities, and in 1849 took him with his elder brother Philaret to Petrograd.

Young Modeste entered the School of SS. Peter and Paul, and began to take piano lessons with one Herke, an excellent pianist and a teacher of repute. Modeste's progress was so rapid that at the age of twelve he was able to take part at a charity concert given at the house of a close friend of his family. The youth played there a Rondo from a Concerto by Herz, and his success was such that Herke, who was never disposed to judge his pupils indulgently, made him a present of a copy of a Beethoven Sonata.

All who knew Musorgsky agree in rendering homage to his talent as a pianist, a faculty which he preserved all his life, from the time of its earliest manifestation. It is important to remember this ; for those few piano works which he has left, are sometimes rather awkwardly written for the instrument, and are always much less " stylized " for the keyboard instrument than one would have

expected, considering his knowledge of piano technique.*

In August 1852, after passing a year in a private preparatory institution, he entered the School of *Ensigns of the Guard* without giving up however, his piano lessons with Herke. In the same year he attempted a musical composition, although he had not the least idea of musical grammar. Herke was so delighted that he had the piece published, and it appeared under the title of *The Ensigns' Polka*, and was dedicated by the author "to his school friends." It turned up again in 1852, says a note in the catalogue of his works, which Musorgsky made in 1871 for Glinka's sister, Madame Shestakoff.

"When at the Cadet's School," (Philaret Musorgsky wrote to Stassoff) "my brother constantly played the piano. During his last two years there, however, he could only take one lesson a week with Herke; but he attended the lessons taken by the daughter of the Commanding Officer of the School, and sometimes played on those occasions." We gather, from the reports, that he worked hard, learning German, a little Latin, and reading historical works assiduously. In the higher classes at the school, he developed a strong taste for German philosophy and spent some time in translating Lavater.

Whilst at school (says his autobiography) he

*The transcriptions of the Beethoven quartets which he made (but did not publish) are not taken into consideration here. The accompaniments of his songs are sometimes written more carefully, and sound better than his pieces for piano solo.

often visited a priest—a professor of divinity, Krupsky, thanks to whom, he gained a very thorough knowledge of the foundations of the ancient music of the Greek Church, and also the musical system of the Roman Church. Later on, especially when he wrote *Khovanshchina*, this knowledge of church styles and liturgical modes was invaluable to him. His courteous and genial nature, quite as much as his musical gifts, won for him a large circle of friends, amongst whom were a number of amateur musicians, and even some professionals. Thus, at the Ensigns' School he made the acquaintance of Asantchevsky, who later on became Principal of the Petrograd Conservatoire. When in 1856, Musorgsky left the school to enter the Preobraiensky regiment, he found many colleagues there who shared his tastes; amongst others, Prince Nicolas Obolensky, to whom he dedicated (October 16th, 1857) a small piano piece (unpublished) entitled *Remembrance of Childhood*; and Gregory Demidoff, who, several years later became a class-inspector at the Petrograd Conservatoire of Music. The young composer being a good pianist and a pleasing singer, quickly became popular in this circle. Had he not, in addition, the prestige of having undertaken (in his very first year in the regiment too) the composition of an opera, both words and music!*

In the same year (1856) he made the acquaintance of Alexander Borodin, a young man five

*From *Han d'Islande* by Victor Hugo: "Nothing resulted from it because nothing could result from it" says the catalogue of 1871. The author was seventeen years old at the time.

years older than himself, and one who had already diligently studied composition for some time; although chiefly occupied with scientific work, Borodin has left a vivid portrait of Musorgsky at that time.

"My first meeting with Musorgsky took place in 1856 in the month of September or October. I had been elected military doctor . . . . Musorgsky was an officer in the newly formed Preobraiensky Regiment. We met accidentally in the orderly room of the hospital, both being on duty. We began to talk, and our sympathies coalesced at once. The same evening we were invited to the house of the chief doctor of the Hospital, Popoff. Musorgsky was then a veritable "fop," very elegant, a fine type of young officer; his well-fitting uniform, all spick and span; his feet, small and shapely; his hair carefully brushed and pomaded, his hands well cared for like the hands of an aristocrat. His manners were exceedingly refined; he spoke mincingly, and he was lavish with his French phrases. He had a slight touch of conceit, but not too much; his education and good breeding remained conspicuous; the ladies were charmed with him. He would sit at the piano, and, with elegant gestures, play portions of *Trovatore* or *Traviata*; around him the company exclaimed in chorus:—'Charming!' 'Delicious!'* I only saw Musorgsky three or four times; then I lost sight of him."†

* In French in the text.
†Quoted by Stassoff in accounts of some other incidents.

One sees from this that there was never any indication that Musorgsky would become anything more than a distinguished amateur. However, one of his friends reported the fact to Stasoff that Musorgsky had begun to find out the meretriciousness of the Italian Opera Music, and had lively discussions on it with his friends. On the other hand, Musorgsky upheld the beauty of Mozart's *Don Juan*. At this time he knew little good music and was quite ignorant of the works of Glinka and Dargomisky.

The same winter, thanks to one of his friends, he made the acquaintance of Dargomisky, whose house he visited frequently, and the master greatly appreciated the musical qualities of the newcomer. It was about this time that Dargomisky's *Russalka* was performed, and the composer was hurt by its poor reception, for it revealed how strongly the public opposes any attempt at originality and sincerity. It was probable that Dargomisky's musical attitude had no little influence on Musorgsky, for they had become very intimate. It showed him the shallowness of an easy success, and of the approval won by mediocre work. Besides this Dargomisky's ideas on musical art were exactly those which Musorgsky confirmed later on by his own words and works:—"I wish" writes Dargomisky "the sound always to express the word in the most direct way. I aim at truth." One sees by this quotation, and by many extracts from Musorgsky's correspondence, how this direct contact acted and re-acted on the two musicians,

and to what use the composer of *Boris Godunoff* later on, put the advice of his older companion.

It was at the musical meetings at Dargomisky's house that Musorgsky learned to understand the Russian music. It was there that he "lived for the first time the real musical life," as he loved to say. He would meet there, towards the end of the year, 1857, Cæsar Cui, who had then been intimate with Balakireff for a year, and proposed with him to form a musical movement less subservient to convention. Cui soon introduced Musorgsky, then only twenty years old, to Balakireff, but it was strikingly evident that Modeste's conscious personality, his artistic feeling and knowledge were even then mature. It was at Balakireff's house that Musorgsky made the acquaintance of Stassoff, who soon became his intimate friend, adviser, and (later on) his biographer. Balakireff was shortly to become the practical head of the group of young artists who were destined to reflect the national music. He was already gathering around him these artists "like a hen her chickens"* as Borodin was accustomed to say.

The comparison is very just, for Balakireff, not content with merely instructing his pupils and friends, encouraged and protected them with tender care. Musorgsky was the first to come to him for lessons; at first these lessons were regularly paid for, but they soon became transformed into friendly talks. Balakireff was particularly de-

*Stassoff. *Borodin.*

sirous of supplying for the present book,* the notes on this period of Musorgsky's musical education which he had given to Stassoff. They are as follows :—

> " Musorgsky and I played in duet form (he was an excellent pianist) all the classical repertoire, ancient and modern : Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Berlioz and Liszt. Musorgsky was already fully intimate with the works of Glinka and Dargomisky. I explained to him the musical forms so well that he composed in piano-duet form an *Allegro* for a Symphony in C major, a work not without merit. Unfortunately the manuscript has disappeared and has not been found with his papers."

In his letter to Stassoff, Balakireff insisted on the fact that " not being a theorist," he could not teach Musorgsky harmony, as later on he taught Rimsky-Korsakoff. But they analyzed the classical works which they played, from the constructional point of view. Balakireff soon induced him to compose more serious pieces than the *Remembrance of Childhood* (*Souvenir d'enfance*). Musorgsky produced in 1858, two *Scherzi*—in G minor and C sharp, and some *Romances*, and began to set to music Sophocles' *Œdipus Rex* which was also given in the following year, thanks to the initiative of Constantine Liadoff.†

*The original of the present translation.

†The *Scherzo* and this *Chorus* have been published, as well as some of the *Romances* composed at this period. The other *Romances* and the *Scherzo in C sharp* remain unpublished.

At this period Musorgsky, who played much music with Cæsar Cui, revealed on several occasions a remarkable talent as a comic actor, a reciter and a singer. He had a light baritone voice. At the friendly parties which took place at Cui's house, he interpreted various parts from the comedies of Kriloff and of Gogol. On one day in particular he made the audience "die with laughter" by the humour with which he depicted the hero of Cui's comic opera *The Mandarin's Son*. This special gift of declamation and of vocal inflexion, which his biographer points out, helped him materially in realizing that absolute fidelity of vocal intonation which was his supreme aim in music.

These social distractions, however, did not prevent Musorgsky following his musical calling ardently; from this time, he was convinced that music was his vocation, and he felt little inclination for a military career, which he considered would not allow him sufficient time for musical work. In 1859, when he was transferred to the Sharp Shooters he was obliged to join the new garrison at Tsarskaia-Slavinska near Petrograd. His mother loved him dearly, and he had always lived with her since his father's death in 1853, thus doubly strengthening the home ties. The prospect of a separation from her, from his friends, and from the centre of his musical studies, provided the desired excuse for shirking the move. Stassoff and his other friends tried in vain to make him see reason. "Lermontoff," Stassoff said one day to

Musorgsky "was able to carry out his military duties as well as produce poems." "Lermontoff and I" was the reply, "are very different persons. He was able to accommodate himself; as for me, I cannot!" And the resignation was accordingly sent in.

During the following summer Musorgsky was unable to apply himself to music on account of a severe nervous illness. He took the water cure, however, with good results. During the autumn he composed a pretty trifle *Kinderscherz* (Children's Play), and another piano piece *Impromptu Appassionata.**

When he returned to Petrograd he again visited Borodin who gave Stassoff the following account of their second meeting:—

> "It was in the autumn of 1859, at the house of S. A. Ivanovsky, then assistant-professor to the School of Medicine and Surgery. Musorgsky had already resigned his commission. He looked much older, was growing stouter, and had lost his military bearing. His elegant appearance and manners were the same but all traces of vanity had disappeared. Musorgsky told me that he had resigned the army, because he wished to devote himself entirely to music; and to combine military duties with art was a difficult

*The *Kinderscherz* was not published until 1873. The original manuscript (in the possession of the author of this volume) bears the date—May 28th, 1860. The *Impromptu* was never engraved. Musorgsky had composed it under a wave of emotion caused by reading a story based on the theme: "*What is to be done?*" Stassoff declares it a piece of no importance.

thing. Naturally we talked music. I was still at that time a staunch Mendelssohnian, and knew nothing of Schumann. Musorgsky saw much of Balakireff and was saturated with all kinds of musical innovations of which I had not the least comprehension. Seeing that we were talking of our profession, Ivanovsky asked us to play a duet arrangement of Mendelssohn's *Symphony in A minor*. Musorgsky did not appear very eager, but said he would like to do it so long as the *Andante* was missed out, as it was "not symphonic," and seemed to be but a "song without words" transcribed for the orchestra- or something similar. We played the first movement and the *Scherzo*. Then Musorgsky began to speak with enthusiasm of Schumann's Symphonies, which I did not know at all. He began to play excerpts from the one in E flat to me. On coming to the middle section, however, he stopped and said :— "There, now the musical mathematics begin." All this was new to me, and I was pleased. Seeing that it interested me, he played some more fresh things. When I discovered that he composed music himself, naturally my interest redoubled. He began to play a *Scherzo* of his own composition. At the *Trio*, he murmured between his teeth :—'How oriental it is.' I confess that when he said that he wished seriously to give up his whole life to music, I was doubtful of the wisdom of such a course at first, believing that he was romancing, and I smiled

to myself. But after hearing his *Scherzo* I asked myself if music ought not to be his calling."

However, there is no doubting the proper choice of Musorgsky's vocation; the story of his life amply proves that. From the very commencement he set himself to attain a definite ideal of truth in art, an ideal which became more and more firmly fixed year by year; and despite the troubles of all kinds which beset him and darkened his life, he held bravely on this course to the very end. His lot was one of almost continual hardship. Poor, and feeble in health, his restless, eager and sensitive spirit was always up in arms against the troubles and difficulties which beset him, causing him to lead such an irregular life. He had scarcely come of age before the family circle to which he was so devoted was broken up. A few years after his father's death, his brother married, and his mother retired to the Toropets property in the country.

Musorgsky divided his life between the town and the country until the year 1863. At first he composed very little music, his only works during the whole of that period being an *Intermezzo* for piano, (orchestrated later on) and three instrumental pieces, of which he gives the titles in his autobiography, but which cannot be traced: *Impromptu*, *Prelude*, and *Menuet-Monstre*.* In 1863 he composed both the words and the music of a piece entitled *King Saul*, which seems to be more a dramatic fragment than a song. This

*The *Grand Minuet* danced by the whole company.

piece which offers several indications of power, possesses but little originality. The eloquence is a little overdone, and the carefully rounded off phrases hardly show us the true Musorgsky * Another work (so far lost) was sketched out about this time: a work, which Stassoff tells us, possesses little interest—an *Alla marcia Notturna* for orchestra on the MS of which is written *Exercise in Instrumentation, Lesson: Wednesday, 14 March,* 1861. It is not known who gave Musorgsky these orchestration lessons. It was not Balakireff; and it is not reasonable to suppose that it was Dargomisky. These first pieces reveal in general a somewhat mediocre inventive faculty, and contain signs of inexperience; for the matter of that, Musorgsky never acquired any great mastery of style, and scarcely troubled himself about it. On the contrary, he forced himself to ignore almost absolutely all the classical technique, derived, as it was, from Germany and Italy.

The moment is now approaching when he is to reveal great creative force as an artist. If we examine the works of this early period in detail, and retrospectively, we can see, even at that time, certain indications, (feeble it is true, yet undeniable) of the opening-out of a very definite personality, which we shall analyze later on. The instrumental music which he had composed up to that time is not very characteristic. From the point of intrinsic merit, we find the *Trio* to the *Scherzo in B*

*An earlier version which remains in MS. (see page 212) is notably more characteristic than the one published.

minor a shade better than the rest. Like nearly all the instrumental pieces of this author, it is quite short, but truly evocative in atmosphere. Though not particularly expressive, the *Intermezzo* is more advanced, and possesses both elegance and charm. It is nevertheless still *in the classical manner*, as Musorgsky himself acknowledged; and is therefore very different from the works which followed it It is, however, extremely characteristic ot his aims, and (according to a confidence made by Musorgsky to Stassoff*) it constitutes the earliest example of his mimetic representations in music of personal gesture, unhampered by a vocal part.

It is noteworthy that we do not find in any of the pieces before the end of 1863, a single pronounced feature of that idiomatic character by which Musorgsky's music is now so readily distinguished from that of his compatriots. The fact that after having passed all the years of his childhood in the country in the midst of the Russian peasantry, he commenced to live again in surroundings which had impressed him so profoundly, contributed not a little to hasten his evolution. "In his infancy and boyhood as in his old age" (writes Philaret Musorgsky to Stassoff) "my brother Modeste always retained a peculiarly strong sympathy for our people and for our peasants. He considered the Russian *moujik* the *true man*." (*Nastoiarshchy chelovek*).

A letter from Musorgsky to Cui (written from Toropets on 22nd June 1863) shows how strongly

*See the chapter on the Instrumental Works.

the scenes and atmosphere of country life acted on the artist's mind. After having traced the picturesque outlines of some of the village "characters" and those occupied in local politics, Musorgsky adds :—"This strong, pure atmosphere affects my feeling for beauty in a very remarkable way; one thinks exclusively of how not to be vitiated, how to avoid asphixiation—and of how to think all this out in music. During my stay here I have turned up a little poem of Goethe, and was so charmed with it, that I have set it to music. Its subject is 'The Beggar' (from *Wilhelm Meister*, I believe). The beggar himself can sing my music without any trouble; so it seems to me."*

Here, then, we find Musorgsky arriving at an important stage in his career. He had an exact perception and a telepathic understanding of the people. The "fop," so carefully depicted by Borodin, had now completely disappeared. The letter quoted shows this in very convincing fashion. Living very simply himself, (for even to the end of his life he never knew luxury), the artist is entirely in that frame of mind which causes him to sing (as none ever did before) the plaint of the innocent, the moan of the poverty-stricken, and the cry of the desperate.

For this was the sole aim which he held before himself during the fine creative period which commenced from that date, and which continued until his very last moments when bodily infirmi-

*This song is not published. It was found in the MS. volume acquired by Mr. Charles Malherbe in 1909. (See page 211.)

ties enfeebled his faculties. Musorgsky was never occupied with pure beauty for its own sake; he only discovered beauty through truth. His sole ambition was to create by his art a *faithful reflection of life without embellishment or variation.*

It almost seems as if the very incomplete musical education which he received, was favourable to the pursuit of this aim, a somewhat restricted one we would readily admit, were it not that certain masterpieces which Musorgsky has produced, serve as proof that it is possible to achieve supreme beauty even under such conditions. Musorgsky's technical outfit always remained very elementary. We have seen that he only commenced to learn musical theory at a very late period, and even then he acquired but a very little knowledge. It cannot be said that his circumstances alone prevented him from acquiring a wider culture, for he lived in the midst of highly-trained musicians, and maintained a constant intercourse with them; with Rimsky-Korsakoff, for example, a renowned theorist, a man gifted with almost unlimited theoretical knowledge. Further, he was in the mood to turn himself only in the direction of his own artistic vocation. We have seen him unhesitatingly abandon a military career; and there is no doubt that, had he wished, he could have found both the time and the opportunities for learning the whole technique of composition from bottom to top. If he neglected to do so, it was because of the opinions which he held on musical art and on the aim of music in general, ideas which were

more confirmed as time went on. He probably understood intuitively that the habits of style which were acquired by such methodical study only acted as shackles on the freedom of the musical thought. This is true in a large measure; the true genius however, always gains his liberty if he sets out to do it, and the artistic cultivation of style, so necessary for absolute beauty, would have been an obstacle to the attainment of that absolute realism which Musorgsky sought. At least, his remark on Schumann's Symphony shows by the manifest exaggeration which we see in it, Musorgsky's antipathy to all the processes of thematic development.*

On viewing the works of his maturity, one cannot help thinking, that from the view of the ideal which he set himself, he was not altogether wrong, for the characterisation and excellence which these works contain, will always atone to a great extent for the fact, that having no precise habit of thought, or acquired facility in writing ready-made formulas, he had each time to create for himself the entire processes for the conception and exposition of his ideas. And thus a group of notes never comes to be with him a mere pattern or *cliché*.

Immediately on returning to Petrograd, Musorgsky lived for three years with five comrades,

*This however, makes it more difficult to understand the reproach which Musorgsky levelled at Mendelssohn's *Andante*—that "it was not symphonic."

forming (according to a custom then very common in Russia) a "community." Each of the six had a private room, and they spent their evenings together in reading and discussion. "All these young men were intelligent, educated, and desirous of not remaining inactive from the intellectual point of view. They rejected the soft life then led by most Russian young men. Until that time, they had lived with their own families; but now they thought well to adopt another kind of living. This new existence enchanted Musorgsky, and exercised on him a happy and lasting influence. For if there be one special trait in his character, it is that he always allowed himself to be much influenced by the friends with whom he lived. The majority of his works were suggested to him either by Stassoff or by one of his other advisers. *Boris Godunoff*, for example, underwent many important alterations on the advice of his friend Nikolsky. How far was such docility favourable to him, and how far detrimental? It is very difficult to say. Certainly the only influences which could act on him were those which encouraged him to follow the direction of his own instincts, for his mind was decidedly not one to renounce any of his fundamental ideas. But that is just where the danger lay; the conception which he had formed of art was far too sweeping, too absolute, and yet too restrictive; and the tenets of his faith had the power of putting obstacles in the way of his acquiring a less restricted feeling, even making him take his very faults as good qualities

in themselves.* On the other hand, it would be very bold to say that Musorgsky's qualities (and what splendid qualities) were not inseparable from the faults themselves. It remains true—and this is the only point which matters here—that never was an artist more often counselled, helped, and guided; and that the part played in the conception of his works by Musorgsky's few special friends was frequently a considerable one. But this is truly of little importance compared with what Musorgsky drew from his own mentality.

He had scarcely commenced to share the life of the "community" when he found himself very hard pressed for money. All other resources having failed, he was obliged to give up part of his time to translating into Russian the proceedings of great criminal cases.

It was about the beginning of his life with the "community" that he commenced the composition of an opera founded on Flaubert's *Salammbo*, of which a Russian translation had been read and very much admired by his companions. He worked at this composition with great assiduity, writing both the words and the music. It was only at the end of 1864 that he abandoned it, after having composed some important pieces for it. The examination of these detached pieces and the fact that Musorgsky made use of nearly

*Stassoff holds him blameworthy on account of excess in the matter of artistic realism. Thus in his Biography of of Musorgsky, he dismisses the admirable vocal suite, *Sunless*, as unimportant.

all that he had written for *Salammbo* in some later works, shows that the author was making rapid progress.

The year 1864 is also the date of the first two of his songs, which are really representative of his fine genius. One, *Night*, has a very classical charm, being lyrical in character, idealistic, a veritable *lied* in fact, containing those very free, highly expressive harmonies, which so frequently form the "hall-mark," as it were, of Musorgsky's finest music. The other, *Kallistrate*, inaugurates a series of songs, realistic in character, both national and popular, into which he puts all the best of his genius; for there his faculties for observation, and his instinctive powers of expression give him a free rein.

Further, *Night* and *Kallistrate* constitute an important landmark in the evolution of Musorgsky's creative life;* and they do this, no less by their spirit than by their musical style.

Then again in the following year, one of his most characteristic people's songs was composed; for *The Peasant's Cradle Song* ranks with his greatest masterpieces. He dedicated this touching yet sublime piece to the memory of his mother, who had just died. About the same time, he wrote two little pieces for piano under the collective title, *Memories of Childhood*: *Nania and*

**Kallistrate* was not published until 1883 with the other posthumous works. *Night* appeared in 1871. Musorgsky orchestrated the accompaniment in 1868. The original words of this song, which appear on Mr. Malherbe's MS. are far superior to those of the published version.

me. (*First punishment*: *Nania shuts me up in the black cupboard*), which he also inscribed to his mother. Together with *The Peasants Cradle-Song*, Musorgsky considered these pieces "thoroughly characteristic of his new tendency" "This astonishes me somewhat," the writer of the biography says, "seeing that they* are very ordinary; and Musorgsky recognised this too, for he never published them, and did not even finish the second one." As an explanation of this, the value which the composer attached to them was in all probability chiefly due to the feelings which prompted the dedication. In this connection, it is the newness of the tendency which is more important than the qualities of its realization. For the first time in his life, Musorgsky attempted in his music to *reproduce the actual life which he saw and felt.*

The blossoming of Musorgsky's genius was exactly coincident with the most active and fruitful period of the new Russian school. Dargomisky, conscious of a new ideal of dramatic truth, was working at the full score of his *Statue Guest*, a work destined to exercise a decisive influence on his younger colleagues. Balakireff had founded, together with Lomakin, a Free School of Music, where symphonic concerts were devoted partly to the work of young Russian musicians. Balakireff preached both by the example of his own compositions, and by circulating good advice, and encouraging words. He himself collected a large number of those beautiful folk-songs which played

**viz*: *Memories of Childhood.*

so great a part in the inspiration of Russian music, "setting all his comrades on fire by his own mighty flame."* It was owing to the influence of this young master that Borodin (like Musorgsky) decided to adopt musical composition as a calling. At that time Borodin had written his first songs and had finished his *Symphony in E flat*. Rimsky-Korsakoff, having returned from his voyage round the world, was preparing to devote himself to music, and brought back with him his *Symphony in E major*, for Balakireff's inspection. Cæsar Cui, whilst producing numerous musical compositions, vigorously affirmed and widely propagated the new ideas by his writings. In the midst of this happy circle round Balakireff, Musorgsky learned day by day to understand music better, and to love it more and more.

Balakireff's influence seems to have been mainly of a general order; after the lessons in analysis and formal construction in 1857-8, he gave advice to Musorgsky concerning his musical writing and orchestration. But Balakireff himself was the very opposite of a realist in art, and leaned towards the higher forms of artistic formalization.† That was not the road for Musorgsky. On the other hand, Dargomisky was continually influencing Musorgsky by the fundamental affinities of temperament which existed between the two artists.

"I wish the sound always to express the word in the most direct way. My intention is not to

*Stassoff's *Biography*.
†*Stylisation*, in the French.

reduce music to a pastime for the delectation of the *dilettanti*. I aim at truth; that is what people do not understand."

Thus the author of the *Statue Guest* fearlessly expressed his musical creed. Still Musorgsky himself tells us hardly anything, and the respective words of the two composers do not offer any very evident analogies. But the two composers proceeded in distinctly similar directions. Musorgsky with a nature less disciplined, and a sensibility keener and quicker than Dargomisky's, expressed himself in an instinctive musical language, proteid in form, epigrammatic, inspired by a principle never out of mind—a musical language whose essential characteristics cannot be referred to any anterior model.

Straightened means obliged the composer in 1863 to accept a mediocre government office; this was obtained by the watchful care of his friend Opotchinin, an excellent amateur singer, and constant visitor at Dargomisky's house. It was to the care of Opotchinin that Musorgsky's mother had entrusted her son when she left Petrograd.

Towards the end of the summer of 1865, Musorgsky had a rather serious attack of some nervous malady. After some resistance, he finally followed the advice of his brother and sister-in-law, and gave up the life of the "community" for a country existence at Minkino, where he spent three years (until 1868) passing some part of his time in family life. He recovered his health in this more peaceful environment which greatly favoured the development of his creative power.

During the early part of his stay at Minkino, he was moved to compose an extraordinarily realistic song, *O my Savishna* (*The Village Idiot's Love Song*). This piece if it does not surpass in beauty the *Peasant's Cradle-Song*, written about the same time, certainly reproduces the disappointed and baffled soul of the Russian peasant with an equal fidelity, and in an even more graphic manner. The circumstances which led Musorgsky to write this piece, are worthy of note. Here is the story as he himself imparted it to Stasoff :—

One day from his window he saw and overheard the village idiot * making fervent love to the village beauty, striving to touch her pity, whilst he blushed at the knowledge of his own weakness and ugliness. All the time the poor unfortunate being seemed to comprehend that love and joy could not possibly be his lot. Musorgsky was profoundly moved. The plight of the afflicted one, and indeed the entire scene, was deeply engraven on the composer's mind, and suggested to him, certain modes of expression, as truly original as they were singularly appropriate for the evocation of this remarkable picture, with all its passion and pathos. The composer wrote the words himself, adopting a purposely monotonous rhythm, and actually reproduced in the music in an emphatic manner, the eager gestures, nay, the very short-breathed panting of the halfwitted suitor. This specialized process of composition evidently limited

**Yurodivy*, a witless simpleton. The type is used again in *Boris Godunoff*.

him to the *simple artistic reproduction* of the emotional scene, rather than to any personal commentary of the musician-poet. The piece is thus in exact keeping with all Musorgsky's realistic predispositions.

The year 1866 was uneventful for Musorgsky, his time being divided between the country and the Northern capital, where he continued to visit Balakireff and his circle. It was at Stassoff's that Madame Shestakoff, Glinka's sister, first met him. She has left some very interesting accounts, from which I quote the following:—"When I saw Musorgsky for the first time, he was a smart officer of twenty-seven years of age in the Preobaiensky regiment.* At our first meeting I was struck by his extreme quietness and by his lovable disposition. During the fifteen years when I saw him constantly, I could never once accuse him, even in his greatest trials, of the least bad temper; never have I heard a harsh word from him; and when I expressed my astonishment at noticing this, he always replied:—'I owe it to my mother; she was a perfect saint.' Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakoff were very close friends; they lived a long way from each other, and used to come a little earlier to our musical parties, so as to first talk to each other. Rimsky-Korsakoff would go to the piano and play his latest compositions, whilst Musorgsky listened attentively, and afterwards made his remarks. Then Rimsky-Korsakoff would pace up and down

*Madame Shestakoff was mistaken: Musorgsky had resigned his commission eight years before this.

the room restlessly, whilst Musorgsky, always very modest, played on the piano. A little later, Rimsky-Korsakoff would make his observations, to which Musorgsky listened attentively, often acting on the advice."*

Musorgsky was busy perfecting his orchestral writing, and at the end of the year, he nearly completed a long chorus with orchestral accompaniment: *The Defeat of Sennacherib*, which however, possesses little significance. In February 1867, Balakireff conducted the first performance of it at a concert of the Free Music School at Petrograd.

In the same year, Musorgsky orchestrated his *Intermezzo*† which he dedicated to Borodin. He also composed his symphonic poem for orchestra—*A Night on the Bare Mountain*, a piece which he rewrote several times, later on. In the same year he gave many proofs of activity, composing a number of songs and transcribing for piano solo, some movements from Beethoven's Quartets: the *Scherzo*, *Adagio* and *Finale* of Op. 131, and the *Scherzi* of Opp. 59 and 135. These were done for the musical meetings which took place at the Opotchinins' house.

Amongst the most characteristic productions of 1866-7, one must mention his *Hopak* for voice and piano, one of his most realistic and representative pieces; *The Seminarist*, which, like

*L. Shestakoff: *Souvenirs*. Some selections were translated by Madame Olenin Alheim in the *Revue internationale de musique*, August 1st, 1898.

†He took advantage of this opportunity of making certain slight, but happy, alterations.

Kallistrate, constitutes a sort of humorous musical silhouette, but is of the nature of a pure caricature ;* *The Classicist*, another caricature (a satire directed in a very marked fashion against the ultra-conservative critic Famintsin), an exquisite piece, a "genre" picture full of humour ; *On the Banks of the Don* ; and finally *The Magpie* and *The Ragamuffin*. The last two songs are equally strong in realism ; the first is of a purely fantastic spirit, rather exceptional in Musorgsky's music ; the second, a characteristic sketch of Russian manners, but highly finished in musical style. Most of the pieces composed by Musorgsky at this period, besides being so very individual, are also real songs, more or less developed, and not devoid of true lyrical feeling.

The year 1868, when Musorgsky spent the greater part of his life in the country amongst conditions most favourable to work, was one of the fullest in his artistic career. Attracted by the verve and the national and realistic character of Gogol's *The Marriage-Broker*, he decided to set it to music as it stood, without transforming it into a conventional *libretto*, in order that the music should serve to accentuate the pristine qualities of the text, and also in order that the complete combination might produce something entirely new. Musorgsky's ambition was to realise the exact artistic reproduction of life itself. He worked on *The Marriage-Broker* with enthusiasm. On July 3rd, 1868, he wrote to Cæsar Cui :—

**The Seminarist*, forbidden by the Russian censor, was published at Leipzig in 1870.

"Good day, my dear Cæsar! Behold me here turned out to grass, both in body and mind. I drink milk and spend the whole day in the open air. . . . The first act of *The Marriage-Broker* * is divided into three scenes. . . . According to your recommendations and the advice of Dargomisky, I have succeeded in extracting the essential, and have considerably simplified what I showed you. I have found a very successful orchestral phrase, which cannot be bettered, for Podkolessin in the Scene of the Betrothal. Dargomisky, I believe, is enchanted with it. The second scene is actually sketched in outline. "Here is the deceitful dog" and the "Grey hairs" have come out well. I believe that this little scene is not at all bad, and that it will prove interesting . . . . I want to get the first act finished by the winter; then we can try it over and make our plans. Kotchkareff would stage it, especially for you, my dear boy. Tell your dear wife that the scene with Thecla (the marriage-broker) is successful; it will satisfy her, I think. I know she is interested in my daring plan. Contrary to my custom, I started the sketch completely away from any instrument."

Postscript on July 10th . . . . "I have finished the first act. . . . instead of three scenes it has come out to four; it was necessary.'†

*In Russia, a woman engaged professionally to arrange marriages.

†See pages 140 *sq* for other extracts of letters relating to *The Marriage-Broker*.

In the autumn, when Musorgsky returned to Petrograd, the first act was performed at the musical evenings of the little circle of friends; Dargomisky was entrusted with the role of Kotchkareft; Musorgsky took that of Podkolessin, and Nadeina Purgold (the future Madame Rimsky-Korsakoff) played the piano. At this rehearsal the work obtained immediate and unanimous approval, both by its humorous qualities, and its completely natural character.

During that year, besides the first act of *The Marriage-Broker*, Musorgsky composed some fine songs: *The Orphan Beggar Child*, a page of poignant realism, which perhaps reaches the level of *O my Savishna*; *Eremushka's Cradle Song*, a new and striking expression of that spirit of resignation, so characteristic of the Russian peasant, which the composer had already evoked in the *Peasant's Cradle Song*, and also (under a less tragic aspect) in *Kallistrate*; and the first of the highly original and tasteful pieces which later on formed the song-cycle—*In the Nursery*. Dargomisky, to whom this last-named piece was dedicated, recognising at once its originality and insight, pressed Musorgsky very earnestly to continue this series. But Musorgsky then wrote only a graceful *Child's Song* which was published separately in 1871. He had given himself up entirely to a musical drama on a subject drawn from Russian history: *Boris Godunoff*.

In the autumn, he was comfortably settled at

Petrograd with his friends, the Opotchinins. He lived with them until 1870, and they always remained devoted to him. He had given up his administrative post and depended entirely from that time on a small appointment in the Ministry of Woods and Forests. He continued in this new post for nine years, as it left him a number of free hours each day. This was one of the happiest periods of his life; he worked hard, and was surrounded by friends who appreciated every new effort and were prodigal with their encouragements.

The idea of seeking a subject for a musical drama in Pushkin's *Boris Godunoff* was suggested to Musorgsky by a friend, Professor Nicolsky, who had met him at the house of Glinka's sister, Madame Shestakoff. The composer was so enamoured with the plan, that he immediately dropped the continuation of *The Marriage-Broker*, of which the outlines of the second act were well advanced; and about September 1868, he set to work on his new task. He composed with an incredible rapidity; for in the middle of November, the first act was finished, and a year later, the first version of the opera was complete. He orchestrated it during the winter of 1869-70. On June 13th, he wrote to Alexandra Purgold, sister of Nadeina, and, like her, a regular attendant at the musical evenings of "the Five":—"I have been to see the theatre director; he tells me that he cannot give anything new this year; however, it is possible that I may be called upon about the middle of

August, or rather the beginning of September, to terrorise these gentlemen with *Boris.*"

This first version was much shorter than the final; for the later one Musorgsky used some of the principal scenes in Puskhin's work just as they stood; he modified others, and finally wrote the greater part of the libretto himself. As each of these different parts was composed, Musorgsky performed them on the piano before his circle of friends. He himself sang nearly all the vocal parts, Miss Alexandra Purgold having charge of the small feminine roles. The enthusiasm aroused by this highly original and powerful work was very great; everyone immediately recognised its grandeur and its novelty. Dargomisky had no sooner heard the first act and the Scene in the Inn, than he declared with deep feeling that Musorgsky "had gone far beyond him."*

All his friends expressed the same opinion with one accord, the four acts which were then composed, full of beauties as they were, appeared in certain respects incomplete; the feminine element in particular played hardly any part.† Musorgsky stoutly refused to admit the justice of these observations; but in the autumn of 1870, he was compelled to give in. The theatre direction refused *Boris Godunoff* because it contained too many

*Dargomisky died in 1869.

†Here is a plan of the first version :—(1). The crowd await the election of Boris to the throne. The coronation of Boris. (2). Pimen's cell. (3). Scene in the Inn. (4). Boris with the children; Shuisky. (5). Scene at the Duma, and the death of Boris. (6). The revolt of the peasants, and the entry of the usurper.

choruses and too many ensembles, and because the scanty nature of the principal roles gave them insufficient importance. Musorgsky then undertook a long series of revisions, thanks to which *Boris Godunoff* assumed the form under which we now know it.

In 1870, Musorgsky composed also a novel kind of musical satire, much more developed than *The Classicist*, and called it *The Musicians' Puppet-Show.** It ridiculed, amongst others, the chief opponents of the New Russian School, and of modern music in general:—Seroff, the composer-critic; Zeremba, the Director of the Petrograd Conservatoire; Theophilus Tolstoy, the critic; and the new writer, Famintsin, whom he had already caricatured in *The Classicist*. This "libel in music," witty and trenchant, yet without spite, appeared at the moment when the quarrels between the two camps were both frequent and lively. Its success was immense, and the victims themselves were the first to laugh, out of sheer amusement. From the strictly musical point of view, *The Puppet-Show* affords no particular musical interest, save that it occupies a unique place amongst all the music created by Musorgsky, and seems to have been very successful within the limits of its special object.

With the four new pieces for the series *In the Nursery*, the case is far different. Musorgsky, following the advice given so insistently by Dar-

*The true rendering of the Russian title is *Optic Theatre*; it illustrates an exhibition of grotesque marionettes, and not, as one might suppose, stage scenes at a high class theatre.

gomisky, finished them before the end of this year. The titles are:—*Go into the Corner*; *The Cock-chafer*; *The Doll's Cradle-Song*; and *Evening Prayer*. Their scrupulous realism reveals the extreme sensibility of Musorgsky's imagination, and the very minuteness of the artistic reproduction is the result of his probing to the very heart of the subject. Nothing better characterizes Musorgsky's temperament; nothing is more fully representative of his ideal of truthfulness in art than the particular kind of artistic interpretation which he achieved in this work.

The year 1871 was entirely taken up with the revisions of *Boris Godunoff*. Musorgsky had then left the Opotchinin household, and was sharing a flat with Rimsky-Korsakoff. There the two friends worked together, one on each side of the room. Rimsky-Korsakoff was then composing *The Maid of Pskoff*, (*La Pskovitaine*).

Acting on his friends' advice (and particularly of Stassoff and the architect Victor Hartmann) Musorgsky wrote a number of supplementary scenes to *Boris*, and extended some of those already written. The whole of the third act (the scenes in Mnishek's palace); the opening of the second scene of the first act (the Inn; the Hostess' Song); the greater part of the first scene of the second act, for instance, the episodes of the Chiming Clock, and the Parraquet, were then composed and incorporated into the score; the scene in Pimen's cell was amplified, and Musorgsky there inserted a choral phrase of much grandeur. Finally about

1870, on the advice of Nicolsky, he decided to conclude the opera, not with the death of *Boris*, but with the People's Revolt, the triumphal entry of the Usurper, and the complaint of the poor idiot on Russia's misfortunes. This latter was the penultimate scene of the original version, and was here further developed. All these modifications were of first importance, conforming essentially to the spirit of the work, which thereby gained greatly in effect and breadth, notwithstanding that (or perhaps because) it was in strong contrast to the usual theatrical routine. Indeed, it was very fortunate for us that Musorgsky had his hand forced in the matter; for in its final form, *Boris Godunoff* is incontestibly superior to the original version; and this, in spite of certain additions which are only partially satisfying.

In the winter of 1871 and 1872, the private rehearsals of the work were resumed, both at the friendly reunions, as well as at the houses of other friends, of which Lukachevitch, the chief of the decorative and costume section of the theatre, was one.

The same winter, the opera director Gudeonoff. conceived the idea of engaging the four composers—Musorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakoff and Cui—each to write a different part of a grand fairy-opera, *Mlada*, which he proposed to mount in an unusually sumptuous manner. Musorgsky was to do some scenes dealing with folk types, and with crowds of people, a march to accompany the procession of the Slav Princes, and a grand

fantastic scene "The Sacrifice of the Black Goat on the Bare Mountain." This last subject gave him the opportunity of utilising (with modifications) his Symphonic Poem of 1867. It was destined to yet another transformation, later on.

The composition of *Mlada* occupied Musorgsky nearly to the end of the winter 1871-1872. The orchestration was completely finished at the same time, and the preparation of the scenery well advanced, when Gudeonoff ran short of money, and had to abandon the enterprise. The composers were left in the lurch, with their work on their hands, and with nothing for their pains.*

Hardly had Musorgsky finished working at *Mlada*, when Stassoff proposed to him a new subject for musical drama. "It seemed to me," the biography says, "that the contrasting and the clashing of the Old Russia with the New Russia, the passing of the former and the birth of the latter, afforded a rich subject. Musorgsky acted on my advice. . . . He started on the work enthusiastically. To study the history of the Raskolniky sect of Ancient Russia (The Old Believers), and all the general chronicles of the 17th century, was an enormous task. The numerous and lengthy letters which he wrote me at that period are full of details of these studies, of discussions on the composition of the opera, on the characters and

*Musorgsky had also utilised for *Mlada* some excerpts from earlier works. The March which wass pecially written was published in 1880, with some alteration, under the title of *Turkish March*. Rimsky-Korsakoff, reset the subject of *Mlada*, which now ranks as one of his most beautiful lyric works.

the scenes. The best parts of the work were written between 1872 to 1875."

In February 1873, three excerpts from *Boris Godunoff* were given at the *Maria Theatre* (for the benefit of the manager, K. Kondratieff) the Inn Scene, the Boudoir of Marina Mnishek, and the Scene at the Fountain. Some days before this, Musorgsky had written to Stassoff:—"Now for the verdict. It is good to think that we are considering and working at *Khovanshchina* whilst we are being tried for *Boris*. They will say 'You have trodden under foot all laws human and divine.' We will reply 'Yes,' and add mentally 'So we shall again.' They will croak 'You will quickly be forgotten, and for good.' We reply 'No, no, no, Madam!'"

Despite this joking, pessimistic prophecy, the success of the three scenes was complete, the singer Petroff sustained the role of Varlaam in an admirable manner, and Madame Leonova did equally well with that of the hostess. Musorgsky was fêted and made much of. On the next day, an admirer sent him a floral tribute, the first he had ever received.

Some months later, the rehearsals of *Boris Godunoff* were commenced at the theatre, and on January 24th, 1874, the first public representation took place.*

It was the greatest triumph in Musorgsky's whole life.

*The last of Musorgsky's photographs dates from this period (January 9th). It is reproduced in Pierre d'Alheim's biography.

In 1873, the song-cycle *In the Nursery* was ready, and it immediately became popular.*

Liszt was enchanted with the work; he decided to transcribe it for piano solo; and also intended to dedicate a composition to the author. Musorgsky reveals to Stassoff, in the following letter, the delight which such valuable support gave him:—

> "Liszt stuns me: it seems incredible! Whether I am a fool in music or not, I have not been one with *In the Nursery*? Because I have understood children, considering them as beings in a world of their own, and not as merely amusing dolls—one must not class me amongst the fools. But I never thought that so great a master as Liszt, full as he is of colossal subjects, would seriously understand and appreciate *In the Nursery*. So I am transported with joy."

There is no doubt as to the completeness of the success which Musorgsky scored at the performance of *Boris Godunoff*.† The younger generation entirely recognised its deep significance, the great originality of the work, and they were accordingly full of enthusiasm. Twenty consecutive performances took place, always to full houses. Late at night, groups of young men were heard singing the choruses along the streets and on the Neva Bridge. On the other hand, the critics put forward

*The first edition contained only five pieces; the last two were posthumous.

†The chief singers were *Marina*, Madame Plaitonova; *Boris* M. Melnikoff; *Dmitry*, M. Komissarevsky; *Pimen*, M. Bassilieff; *Varlaam*, M. Petroff.

the usual objections of the kind which a really original work always meets in every country and at all periods. Musorgsky was accused of total ignorance of musical theory, of clumsiness, of lack of taste. The best passages were declared to be those which were in the ordinary operatic style; for example, the child's recitative: "Our parrot was perched. . . ." and the final trio in the Scene by the Fountain.

Stassoff tells us that the first production of *Boris Godunoff* excited in the academically-minded an unprecedented fury which vented itself more particularly in a very mean way. A group of young admirers in the theatre wished to offer to Musorgsky four ornamental wreaths with various inscriptions, "Thanks to you for Boris!"—"Towards new shores," etc. The academics, however, arranged somehow to block the passages completely, and the disappointed enthusiasts were obliged to carry their floral tributes to the composer's home the following day.

Soon after the productions of *Boris Godunoff*, Stassoff suggested that Musorgsky should compose a new musical satire, *The Critic*, where all the old fashioned critics were held up to ridicule. The plan appealed to Musorgsky at first. A small portion was soon composed, after which, feeling the urgency of other more serious works (*Khovanshchina* chiefly) the plan was abandoned.

In the spring of 1874, a posthumous exhibition was held (in the *Fine Art Academy*) of designs and water-colours by the artist-architect, Victor Hart-

mann, one of Musorgsky's best friends. The composer, deeply moved, wished "to reproduce in music" the best of the drawings, as an act of homage to the memory of Hartmann. The result was the suite of pianoforte pieces called *Pictures from an Exhibition*. This work ranks with *The Night on the Bare Mountain* as unquestionably the most significant piece of instrumental music Musorgsky produced.* An important revision of *The Defeat of Sennacherib* bears the same date.

During 1874 and 1875, Musorgsky shared rooms with one of his friends, Count Golenistcheff-Kutusoff. This poet made a great impression on him, and turned Musorgsky's thoughts into new, idealistic, and mystic channels with less expressly realistic tendencies. Golenistcheff-Kutusoff was a poet of real talent, and Musorgsky used his words for some songs which rank amongst his most beautiful pieces. The first in date, written in the autumn of 1874, offers the peculiarity of having been inspired by a painting, just as was the suite *Pictures from an Exhibition*. It represents the famous picture of Verestchagin; a corpse lying forgotten on a battle-field.† The sight of this scene inspired Count Golenistcheff-Kutusoff to write a short pathetic poem which Musorgsky

*The Suite, *Pictures from an Exhibition* was only published in 1878. The MS. bears the date *June 22nd*, 1874.

†The picture was destroyed by its author in consequence of a remark of the Emperor Alexander II, interpreted by the painter as disapproval, or perhaps it was simply out of respect. An unfortunate consequence of this was the delay of the publication of Musorgsky's song; it did not appear until long after the composer's death in 1887.

set to music. But whilst the suite *Pictures from an Exhibition* appears to be a pictorial representation in the strongest possible measure, *Left Behind* goes no further than the poetic and musical expression of the emotion raised by the subject. It is a piece of great solemnity and intense feeling. The same year, Musorgsky set to music some other poems by the same author—six pieces forming a suite entitled *Sunless*. This work is the most ideal, the most subjective, the most lyrical that Musorgsky ever wrote. It is a veritable masterpiece.

It seems that Musorgsky felt his creative power to be diminishing, and from that time, he hastened to produce as much music as possible. Without abandoning the composition of *Khovanshchina*, he revised this year (1874) a Chorus from *Salammbo*, enlarging it, and converting it into the splendid lyric scene *Yissus Navin* (*Joshua*). In 1875, appeared three scenes from the suite *Songs and Dances of Death* (to the words by Golenistcheff-Kutusoff). The *Trépak* in this set is one of the most magnificent inspirations in all musical literature. *The Cradle-Song* (*Death and the Mother*) is more sombre and more intense, almost superhuman in power: the other piece is the strange, impressionistic *Serenade*. The suite was completed in 1877, by the addition of *Field-Marshal Death*, a song intensely dramatic in feeling, but perhaps more superficial than the other three.

These songs were written on the suggestion of Stassoff, who advised Musorgsky to continue to

exploit the same vein, by picturing the death of a uncouth religious fanatic in his cell, of an exile dying when on the point of seeing his native land again, and of a young maiden happy and made much favoured. Musorgsky began to write these new pieces, but never gave them a definite form. His health became more and more uncertain, and his mind less lucid, although his energy never failed. The composition of *Khovanshchina* gave him much trouble. In order to finish this opera at all costs he resolved to modify the original plan of the libretto, by omitting certain scenes, and some of the roles, without recognising the inconveniences of these excessive curtailments.

At the same time, prompted by the desire to write a role of a "Little Russian" character for the singer Petroff (the creator of Varlaam in *Boris Godunoff*, and a very great friend of Musorgsky) he undertook to compose another opera, *The Fair of Sorotchinsk*. The subject was drawn from one of the most humorous and fantastic of Gogol's tales. Musorgsky unfortunately only finished fragments of this new work, where his genius would have been able to shine in the same humorous and homely way as in *The Marriage Broker*. The few written pages—some sketches for the Prelude, three songs, and a strong and clever instrumental dance *Hopak*—scarcely allow one to form any adequate opinion of the whole work. *The Night on the Bare Mountain* was revised in order to be incorporated in the score of this new work.

From the year 1876, Musorgsky lived a very

miserable life. His *Boris Godunoff*, after having suffered various mutilations, was withdrawn from the repertoire, " No one knows why " says Stassoff. However, he did not lose courage. His greatest pleasure was to take part as accompanist in the concerts given periodically for the benefit of poor students, for which he eagerly offered his help. Obliged to live on the meagre salary which he drew as a State servant, he tried to earn something further by exercising his talent for pianoforte accompaniment. In June, 1876, he wrote to Stassoff, " In reality, very agile on the piano, I am convinced that if it were necessary for me to earn my daily bread by *strumming*, I could do it." Unfortunately, experience destroyed this hope.

In 1877, Musorgsky produced besides *Field-Marshal Death*, some airs (of small significance) on some words by Alexis Tolstoy. He revised one of his earlier compositions, the *Song of Yarema*, and changed its title to *The Dniepr*.

In the following year, he was much distressed by the death of Petroff, " the man whom he most loved and esteemed." He felt lonely and tired.* This year was passed in complete inaction. In 1879, on account of some friction, he resigned his government post, and thanks to a friend's intervention, was for a short time placed in the Controller's department. However, he undertook, with Madame Leonova, a singer of fine interpretive powers, an extended tour in the South of Russia.

**Recollections of Madame Shestakoff*, quoted by Madame Olenin, (*International Musical Review*, 1898).

The two artists were rewarded by a series of triumphs, concerts being given at Poltava, Kherson, Odessa, and other cities. Musorgsky once more found some leisure time, and during the tour, produced a small number of piano pieces, not lacking in merit* ; also the *Song of the Flea* (from Goethe's *Faust,* translated by Strugovstchikoff). On his return, he had the pleasure of hearing some parts of his *Khovanshchina* performed at a concert given by the Free Music School, under the direction of Balakireff. These excerpts were the Scene in the Streltsian Quarter, Moscow, Martha's Song, and the Persian Dances (November 1879). During the winter of 1879-80, the only work to which he devoted himself was the revision and the orchestration of the *March of the Princes* for *Mlada* which was given the name of *Marcia alla Turca,* and was played at the beginning of the year 1880, at a concert of the Russian Musical Society. The following year, he planned a grand suite for orchestra with harps and piano. On the 5th of August, he wrote to Stassoff, " I collected the motives for it during many different travels abroad. They will appear in the programme as : *From the Bulgarian Coast, Across the Black Sea, The Caucasus, The Caspian, Fergan,* even to *Bermak.* The Suite is already begun." But he never even filled in the rough sketches.

*The titles of these pieces (as given by Stassoff and other biographers) are *Baidarky, Gursuf, Storm on the Black Sea. Baidarky* (according to the publisher Bessel) was the title given to the first version of the *Persian Dances,* which were placed later on in *Khovanshchina.* The title of the *Storm on the Black Sea* has been changed (see the catalogue in the Appendix).

During this summer, Musorgsky lived in the country with Madame Leontieft; there he worked for the last time at *Khovanshchina*, of which he succeeded in finishing, or at least nearly finishing, the short-score arrangement for piano and voice. His health steadily failing, he definitely resigned his government appointment, and very shortly after was obliged to enter the military hospital of St. Nicolas. The painter Repin made in 1881 a striking portrait, which shows him as he appeared a few days before his death, ravaged and wasted by alcohol, dishevelled, and in his great invalid dressing-gown. However, his look remains infinitely expressive, conscious, and very calm.* There is a great contrast between this painting, which is evidently sincere, and Borodin's description of the fine polished officer of 1856, or even the photograph of 1874, which shews Musorgsky as a serious man, and still careful of his appearance.

The last weeks of his life were very miserable, in spite of the frequent presence around his bed of his friends and his companions in his life-struggle, notably Balakireff. The latter saw him and was able to talk with him up to the very point of death. It was on the 16th (N.S. 29th) of March, 1881, his birthday, that Musorgsky passed away. He was buried in the cemetery of the Alexander Nevsky Convent, where in November, 1885, a monument, the work of the architect Bogomotoff and of the sculptor Gunsburg, was dedicated to his

*This portrait is found at Moscow in the Tretiakoff Gallery.

memory—thanks to the initiative of his friends and admirers

Rimsky-Kosrokoff, Liadoff, and Stassoff exerted themselves to get the works which he left, published—Rimsky-Korsakoff even finishing *Khovanshchina* and orchestrating it. The first production of this work took place in Petrograd in 1885, being undertaken by a circle of amateurs. *Khovanshchina* was produced again in 1897 in Solodovnikoff, Moscow. Several productions of *Boris Godunoff* had taken in Moscow in 1889, but after this fresh experience it was considered necessary "in order that it should not offend people's taste," for M. Rimsky-Korsakoff to undertake, not only to correct the part-writing and the instrumentation, but also to make considerable changes in it. In this new form *Boris Godunoff* has reproduced at Petrograd in 1896, and was re-appeared frequently.

Such was the strange fate of this singular artist, of this creator, so great, but so disconcerting in many ways. Musorgsky paid dearly for the price of his genius; and on this account, he should only be the more prized by us. He did not perhaps possess the highest knowledge; but his was an ardent soul, full of radiance, which seemed to emanate from some supernatural source. He is markedly detached from all those artists who have produced masterpieces by following paths denied to Musorgsky. Let us not forget that the road—rough and narrow, sometimes obscure, but

always direct—which he followed with such firm conviction, led him right up to the very domain of Beauty, through the gates of Life itself.

The zeal which animated his search for artistic truth, is amply proven in numberless passages from the letters which he wrote to Stassoff :—

"Tell me why, when I listen to young artists, painters, or sculptors talking, I can follow their thoughts, understand their opinions, their aims, and I rarely hear these people talking technically save when it is absolutely necessary. When on the other hand, I am with musicians, I seldom hear them express a single living thought. One would think they were all on school benches. They only understand "technique" and technical terms. Is musical art so young then, that it is necessary to study it in this childish manner?" (July 13th, 1872).

"The artistic representation of Beauty alone in its material aspect is sheer childishness, an elementary form of art; the characteristic features of individuals and of masses, the persistent exploration of this domain still little. known—there lies the true duty of the artist. To new lands! Fearless in spite of tempests, rocks and shallows! To new shores! Crowds, like individuals always offer distinctive features, hard to penetrate, not yet understood. Watch them carefully, learn to understand them under all the varying conditions by observation and deduction. Study them deeply, cherish their

humanity, for it is a source of strength not yet recognised. There lies your duty; there is to be found the supreme joy of life!" (October 18th, 1872).

"Instead of making their fugues and the conventional three obligatory acts in opera, why do not people open some good books and talk about them with clever men? For is it not the best road to art for the modern man, and the only justification of his duty as an artist? *Life*, especially where it is made manifest; *Truth*, however bitter it may be; *Fearlessness*, the free speech. To be in touch with life at close quarters: that is my leaven; that is what I crave for and what I hope will never fail. This is now my position, and here I shall remain." August 7th, 1875.

"When I recall certain artists restrained and prevented by such barriers, I have no superior feelings, only a disheartening companionship. All the aspirations of these people accumulate and are discharged one by one in tiny equal drops. The things which delight them only bring grief and annoyance to a true man. Examine yourself. Have you claws, or only smooth stumps? Are you a deer or a web-footed creature? Where are you? *Outside the barrier*? . . Lacking inintelligence and will, these people become entangled in the meshes of tradition; they confirm the law of inertia,

whilst they believe they are acting for the general good. All this would be quite devoid of interest, and to a certain extent antipathetic, if these artists had not begun by seizing the staff of a new banner which they try to flaunt proudly in the face of humanity. They aim at the goal towards which their greatest men have pressed, but their coats of mail are soon pierced; they easily become tired, and cry for rest. Where do they rest? On the bosom of tradition. 'As our forefathers have done, so will we do.' They have hidden, well hidden, the glorious standard in a secret corner, fastened up with seven locks and seven doors. They rest, and rest, and rest. Without any aim, and without any desire, seeing nothing and never wishing to see anything, they take the trouble to do over and over again what has already been done, what nobody wants. And so it is that from time to time the frogs,* croaking with pleasure in the marshy homes, distribute eulogies to these artists. But why should they not praise them? They have become soulless prevaricators; their whip is but a child's plaything. They take no interest in the essentials of life. People more useless to contemporary art are verily not to be found, I think, in the whole world of living Nature." (October, 1875).

What great truth lies in these phrases with their impetuous rush, and fiery manner, perhaps a little

*The critics.

grandiloquent at times! And it is not without reason that Musorgsky can conclude his short autobiography with the following lines:—

"Neither by his ideas on music nor by the character of his compositions, does Musorgsky belong to any already existing group of musicians. The formula of his profession of artistic faith is 'Art is a means of conversing with men and not an end in itself. This direct principle defines all his creative activity. Convinced like Virchoff and Gervinus, that human speech is strictly regulated by musical laws, Musorgsky takes, as his aim in the art of sounds, the reproduction in music, not of the movements of the human feelings alone, but more especially of the natural inflections of human speech. He maintains that in the domain of art, reformers such as Palestrina, Bach, Gluck, Beethoven, Berlioz and Liszt, have themselves created their own artistic laws; he does not consider the rules to be immutable, but rather subject to the laws of evolution and of progress, in the same degree as the rest of the mental universe."

CHAPTER III

General Characteristics of His Music. Artistic Realism, and its Consequences

Musorgsky, as he himself was aware, occupies a particular place, in many ways a unique position, in the history of art. Considering his work as a whole, the first impression it conveys is that nearly everything is imperfect, incomplete, clumsily or hurriedly filled in; but on the other hand, we can only bow the knee in reverence at the many truly colossal inspirations; and we ask ourselves to what heights an artist, gifted with such clear vision and such power of expression, would have been able to rise, had he possessed a more adequate faculty of realization.

With all its weaknesses, his work well deserves deep study, quite as much for the beauty which it contains, as for the very special character of the personality that it reveals. This examination even offers, from an aesthetic point of view, a special interest on account of its very weaknesses. Musorgsky has produced works worthy of being counted amongst the most beautiful, the most representative of the period, even of the highly cultured

milieu in which they were produced; and this, notwithstanding the fact that they were influenced as little as possible by artistic traditions and habits begotten by technical culture. They remain almost the *manifestation of a sensibility in its purely, natural state.*

Consequently they offer a most precious document of the artist's psychology. One can quickly grasp certain of his processes of expression. For instance, thanks to those examples of unfinished translations concealed by the formalization* we shall see how the artist translates into his art those ideas which are its pretext, those which stir his inspiration; in other words, how the artistic theme is evolved. Moreover—and this is why even the thin places and breaks which one notices in Musorgsky's works form a decisive factor—we there find the means for obtaining by comparison, certain truths of a still more general order concerning the role played by technique and habits of stylization in the genesis of art-works, and other conclusions as to the relative value of the different elements of inspiration, the relations which exist between these elements and the manner in which they are carried out in a musical work. And (more valuable than anything else) we can verify by such clear examples, the degree of analogy, or of dissimilarity, which exists between purely musical inspiration and that where factors outside music come into play: maybe, those commonly recognized as repre-

**Stylisation* in the French.

sentations of movement, mimetics, descriptive notations, etc.*

Amongst all the comparisons which can be established, none are more instructive than those supplied by Musorgsky's instrumental music and songs, for the reason that they belong to the true nature of the composer's genius.

Musorgsky—his theories bear witness to it, his biographer Stassoff has recognised it, and others have repeated it— was above everything *a realist in music*. Let us discover the exact meaning and, if possible, the full meaning of this term.

In the matter of art, realism consists not in the choice of subjects,† not even in the view which the artist takes of the subjects, but more in his *manner of expressing that view artistically*.

From the æsthetic point of view, in order to define realism, other views are necessary than the rough and ready opposition of the realist-artist, who throughout sets himself to "remain always near to nature" and the idealist artist, whose aim is a simplification, a formalization of selected ideas. Realistic art, it is true, has the

*A careful discretion here appears to me justified for the following reason; particularly when the condition is applied to one of the elements peculiar to music; sonority, rhythm, or expression, there is then nothing *extraneous of music* in the real sense of the word. Only conventional representations based on association with ideas, etc. (we find none of them in Musorgsky) require this description. The reader will excuse me in not dwelling on the question here, for it requires a whole volume.

†The readiest definition, according to which realism in art would be characterised by the choice of distasteful, even brutal subjects, does not even deserve to be discussed.

allowance of only a minimum of formalization as its fundamental characteristic. This word denotes the condensation by which an artist, after having profoundly elaborated his sensations and emotions, expresses them in concrete form, simplified and detached from secondary considerations, becoming in some way primitive, and yet by some subtle growth, conforming to a fixed æsthetic canon.

It is expression "extended and generalized." For stylization, when once realized, easily becomes a mere formula, it reproduces the commonplace, the banal, the cliché, and indeed it, and it alone, gives birth to them.*

The realist, then, is the artist who, more occupied with the precise than with the general expression, contents himself with realizing the expression which he seeks, without wishing to add anything to it by stylization.

Let us try to make this somewhat vague definition more precise It shews us firstly that the realist, having decided to express the subject which attracts him (or it may be a simple emotional state) as exactly as possible, endeavours, above everything, not to deviate from his subject; consequently he makes an almost exclusive use of his faculties of observation and of notation. Imagination scarcely ever comes to his aid. Rather than allow his emotion to develop, rather than spread his music out complaisantly, he simply

*When he formalizes, the artist can gather the intensity of the expression by generalizing it; but he also risks attenuating it by rendering it less specific—that is to say, by bending the realization in the direction of the more general laws of the type to which he is leaning.

wishes his work to arouse in his hearers the same emotional process which the idea provoked in him. The painter, by the way, so long as he does not turn towards symbolical abstraction, never does otherwise.

Schumann called one of his pieces, *The Poet Speaks*. A realist does not take the word for his text, except in order to forget for a moment his realism. He never allows his emotion to expand at the expense of the chosen subject ; he never prolongs the expression by that play of forms and artistic devices which is the essential function of music. He strives to interest by his subject alone, rather than by his manner of interpreting it. His work will never be merely a construction emanating from his individuality ; nor a dissociation from the visible world as he sees it ; for it is in these very ideas of the visible world that he finds the true construction itself of the work.

This work however is constructive, in the sense that it only exists in the visible world, to the same extent as the statue in the rough block of marble. The artist disengages the constituent elements, thanks to his conceptive powers, then he creates the artistic equivalent, which in a certain manner only amounts to stylizing, in a very special and restricted manner. The equivalent will be as appropriate and as simple as possible. The superfluous will be removed ; the useful will be condensed ; and everything else likewise, which is necessitated by the translation, by the inter-

pretation, which is the chief condition of all art. If the realist does not see how to evolve the general, then he retains at least the essential.

Æsthetic realism then is not characterized by imitation, properly speaking. It is a vague term, besides being inexact and susceptible to the most contradictory applications. It does not consist of a less concrete or less profound* artistic translation; but lies chiefly in the spirit of the translation, in the way in which the artist first plans his subject, rather than in the movements of his inmost soul, being the cause rather than the results of his emotions, being the emotion which rests rather understood in the subject itself.

Is it possible then, according to this definition for realism to exist in music?

If we accept the case where a vocal *part* is used, or a well-defined programme is followed—certainly not. A musical work is a primitive construction, dissociated from all that is not itself, notably from the ideas which inspired it; it is above all, an *effusion*. Even "programme music" has only artistic value, if it be endowed with this absolute autonomy, with that immediate and universal character which the programme can very well particularize, but cannot extend; nor (for a stronger reason) can it "fill in" anything which is lacking in the sounds. The interest lies not in just assimilation of the programme, but more in the degree and in the quality of the stylization.

*See Goethe: *The True and the Probable in Art-work. Dialogue.* (1798).

It is quite a different thing when music is associated with words: in the song, or in the lyric drama, all degres of stylization can find a place, from the most absolute realism even, to the most generalized expression. This is easily understood, since the flow of the music remains to a certain extent subordinate to that of the words, and the literary art, in order to allow on occasion a very advanced degree of formalization, lends itself no less well to the most pronounced realistic researches.*

A composer of realistic temperament will consequently be little inclined to write instrumental music. Such was the case with Musorgsky. The few piano or orchestral works which he has left are, in general, of little significance; and yet they were produced, for the greater part, under special conditions which will be explained later, with the result that they remain subordinate to the subject which they represent, and are in consequence pure and simple translations.

This composer would treat the words which he sets to music with characteristic sobriety. Not only would he never find there a pretext for his musical *prosopopœia*, for his lyrical efforts, but he would try to render more definite, the elements of suggestion which the text contains, rather than to extend or dilate on their message.† He would

*It goes without saying that for the musician, certain words are incompatible with such treatment, whilst others adapt themselves almost by compulsion.

†This, often most true of Musorgsky, carries however some evident exceptions. Firstly, there are several pieces of pure lyricism (*Sunless*, *Night*, *etc*), the romantic *Field-Marshal Death*, the *Songs and Dances of Death*, and others, which belong to another category.

take little trouble to adorn the words with melodic lines, beautifully proportioned with a sonority of which the material beauty might be its chief merit, or to endow them with a power of autonomous expression; in other words he would seek to "stylize." He would rather search out the characteristic inflections suggested by the words, the expressive accent, the degree of stress, the breaks in the rhythm, or even the continuity, with which the language translates the emotion of the words. Instead of being an emotional language by itself, his music becomes the auxiliary of the words.* The choice of the texts alone would suffice, in a sufficiently large measure, to disclose the tendency to realism. Poems overflowing with lyric effusion, constituting in some way intimate confessions, would be discarded in the same way as so-called "descriptive" words would be rejected. The latter for the most part offer an extended and generalized character; they can only suit the realist-composer, if they contain a precise rhythmic suggestion of the kind which Musorgsky selected for the subjects of his instrumental pieces. This case is rare; for in music, "description" generally consists of a reproduction of feelings experienced, of an emotional representation; what Beethoven called *mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei.*† The only process of material description which can

*That is why it is very unlikely that Liszt thought of transcribing *In The Nursery* for piano solo. Except perhaps for one or two, the pieces which it comprises would be incoherent when deprived of the words.

†More an expression of feeling than a tonepainting.

be possible here—rhythmic translation—never suffices by itself to bring about a musical development; it only furnishes the crude elements. Emotional faculties, or rather the play of symmetrical construction, must intervene; and that is repugnant to the realist. His words should furnish him with the precise ideas, clearly defined movements, rich in distinctive features, and offering a series of typical notations. We shall see to what degree Musorgsky has conformed to this principle.

Then in the realization, as in the composition of music, everything reveals any part taken by stylization beyond what is absolutely necessary. The usual formulas, spontaneous with most of the composers accustomed to stylization, could never come from the pen of a realist; for the reason that for him, the present moment would be different from any other. So Musorgsky is never *like himself;* he has never written two notes *from habit.* M. Claude Debussy has exactly defined his music in these terms:—"It resembles the art of the enquiring primitive man, who discovers music step by step, guided only by his feelings."

Further than this, a song, (whether the words be formed of strophes or of couplets) hardly ever offers sufficient symmetrical alternation and balance of form to justify the application of formal music as a matter of principle. Such formal alternations are only occasionally compatible with that direct and immediate expression which the realist employs. Take for example the longer vocal pieces of Musorgsky. Even those where the same musi-

cal effects might very well logically return (from the *Peasant's Cradle-Song* to the *Serenade* in *The Songs and Dances of Death*—symmetrical as they are in design, etc.) ; or even those which have an intentional thematic basis (*On the River*, from the *Sunless* etc, etc.) they are all, as the Germans say, *durchkomponirt*, that is, developed from beginning to end, and each strophe is treated in its own special way.*

Absolute symmetry, a rudimentary and very characteristic principle in stylization, can scarcely accord with the manifestations of the realistic genius. All the most elementary principles of musical symmetry, those of rhythm, or even of the flowing phrase, are disdained by Musorgsky, entirely occupied as he is with the exact recording. For that reason there are sometimes great irregularities in his music, unusual aspects, but they are always justified by his care for exact truth. One commentator has ridiculed a small piece of Musorgsky, in which he counted twenty-seven changes of time in fifty-three bars ; but, aided by this marvellously sensitive and faithful method of expression, which is really " rhythm free from symmetrical restraints," Musorgsky achieves a marvellous exactitude and a striking depth of meaning.

This explains itself, without further commentary,

*One finds exceptions, but they are intentional, and do not affect the principle : *The Magpie*, *The Insolent*, where one notices it in special parts ; the songs in popular form : *Hopak*, *Peasant's Cradle-Song*, *O my Savishna*, etc.

in the matter of the musical notation of speech. Except perhaps in the oratorical style, human language does not run in regular periods. Apart from pages intentionally lyrical, the musician who follows truth, is bound to use rhythms, constantly new, modified, or recast; otherwise he will produce only the conventional and the false. But to appreciate rightly the use of *free rhythm*, from the purely musical point of view, we must examine its employment in instrumental music. Musorgsky offers us several significant examples of it. I will mention, amongst others, the *Promenade* in the *Pictures from an Exhibition*. Everything there is motived by the wish for a direct representation. Musorgsky never furnishes us with an instance of the application of this resource in the service of free musical imagination.

His disdain for "pure music," for the science of construction and development, had no limits. Thus, when he was not assisted by the words which he was setting to music, he had recourse, as we shall see, to combinations of more or less complex imagery. His *Intermezzo* was suggested to him by an actual scene; and one notices that his instrumental pieces are so much more mediocre when the material idea is less characteristic, and especially when it is less rich in rhythmic suggestion.

This was Musorgsky's chief mistake: in order to free himself from the restraint of form and design (and it is not possible to imagine any real work of art without doing so) it is necessary to be a master of form; and one cannot put aside any

student's rule before having been able to conform to it. Musorgsky failed to understand this truth. Because he was not capable of penetrating it, he turned aside. He created laboriously, clumsily, imperfectly. It was truly only owing to the power of his genius that he produced immortal pages: he always did this, when his inspiration was sufficiently powerful to record itself in its own way. The deep sincerity, the absolute spontaneity which he always preserved, in spite of all the weaknesses we have noticed, gives artistic value to nearly everything that he wrote. Complete works, even complete pages, which entirely satisfy all the aspirations of the listener, carrying him away and overawing him, are rare with Musorgsky; but there are some. And then when Musorgsky remains faithful to this conception (very insufficient in principle as it is, and leading him to a minute realism, almost to the point of being a little dry from an artistic point of view) he attains positive perfection in that particular style which he adopts. Thus the tragic psalm-like chanting in *The Orphan Beggar Child* never rises musically to the same artistic plane as *The Peasant's Cradle-Song* or *On the River*, but its pathos is equally profound, and Musorgsky has achieved his object. It is only the manner of attaining it which is peculiar.

To resume, after having analysed as far as possible, the consideration of the complex ideas which are included under the convenient but insufficiently explicit word "realism," we have shewn the principal characteristics of the art

which this work seeks to define. Realism, an excellent principle in the sense that it is opposed to all conventional stylization—Musorgsky's work is a striking example of it—remains a one-sided principle, which sometimes has chiefly a negative force. This is perhaps only true in the matter of music; but there, doubt is impossible. To pure (instrumental) music, this principle offers little resource, and supplies at the most, the cruder elements, without ever leading to any higher degree of artistic creation or of organisation. Musorgsky's pieces prove it, as I shall attempt to establish in the following chapter. Music, as an autonomous art, has for its fundamental rôle, that of stylizing in generalization; its object is *universal* expression. In this way, it is the very opposite of realism. From this point of view, there is no essential difference between "programme" (or "descriptive") music, and the so-called "pure music." Both are autonomous in an equal degree, and both ought equally to be self-sufficing.

The examination of Musorgsky's instrumental works allows us to determine on the one hand the part which music can take in the direction of realism: and on the other hand, how the pure realist in music falls short of his object. Yet in Musorgsky's vocal music, we state undeniably that the realist can attain an ideal, an intensity, an expressive truth, which is sufficient to create masterpieces; that it can even go further and attain another ideal by the part played by realism—

the ideal of musical eurythmics and of sheer material beauty. With that faculty of detachment from all trodden paths and fixed attitudes, with his ability to create supreme autonomous music, Musorgsky might possibly have been able without abandoning any of his other qualities, to attain the same high level for his instrumental music also, and then he would have become master of the whole domain of his art.

At least, it would please many to imagine him thus. In fact, one must beware of drawing so serious a conclusion, from the analysis of the kind which we have attempted here; such analysis might lead to certain conclusions; but it would never justify an assumption of so general a kind. Would the qualities which Musorgsky lacked have helped him to amplify the manifestations of his genius? Would they have made his works more beautiful? These are idle questions, the only essential one being:—*What are the elements of inspiration, and what are their respective rôles?*

It will serve our purpose to examine, firstly, Musorgsky's work as it is. Then—and this will not prevent us in the least bit from feeling and admiring its beauty without vain restrictions—one may propose to study the origin of each work, to find out if the constituent principle governs the particular character, and if by that, one can be put on the track of some truth of a general nature. The problems, which in the matter of musical æsthetics, remain positive even to this day, are more numerous than vital. No artist of genius

has remained so near to a natural state of sensation, as has Musorgsky; no one has left us beautiful works so ingenuously revealed, works which give us in an equal degree the opportunity, I will not say of resolving these problems, but at least of clearing a way which may perhaps lead to some solutions. One cannot resist the opportunity afforded of profiting by such enquiries; and one may surely do this, without being charged with any want of respect for the genius of Musorgsky.

CHAPTER IV

THE INSTRUMENTAL COMPOSITIONS.

We have seen that if Musorgsky never possessed the feeling of music for its own sake, it was not on account of the slightness of a technical education that he was unable to finish; it was an essential element in his nature, certainly a very peculiar one. It is almost paradoxical to place him as a weaver of sounds.* But as soon as he found in a subject how to realise his aim, which is "never a purely musical one" as with Mozart or Chopin, he achieved it in a perfectly adequate manner, sometimes in a style admittedly musical—which seems to prove that virtuosity of composition and of part-writing are only useful to a temperament like his as somewhat mediocre resources. No knowledge of method and style could have enabled him to further enrich, for example, the prodigious tableau,

*It would be hard to find another example of this. Berlioz however, who hardly ever had (except in words) the musical feeling for music, can in this respect be compared to a certain extent with Musorgsky. But he had at his command streams of complaisant rhetoric of a kind which the Russian musician always ignored; and on the other hand, Berlioz never discovered such striking, musical methods of expression as those which abound with the latter. Still, Musorgsky's music, compared with the "musical mathematics" of Schumann, is almost analogous to Berlioz' music compared with the fugues of Bach.

so full of intrinsic qualities, which forms the conclusion to *Boris Godunoff*; to add to the delicacy of *In the Nursery*, to the emotion and power of the *Songs and Dances of Death*, to the deep pathos of the *Sunless* song-cycle, to the pathetic appeal of *The Peasant's Cradle-Song*. It is also certainly astonishing that an artist capable of such high attainments should have given such manifest and persistent proofs of weakness elsewhere.

But we must not forget that music in Musorgsky's hands, in order that it should be an admirably expressive language, was never a completely autonomous and independent speech; it only became a language when associated with something else: words to be accentuated, or form, or model, to be represented. Once animated by this contact, it acquired a greater or a less expansion of power, according to the resources which the initial subjects offered him.

From this point of view, one notices an essential analogy between the inspiration of Musorgsky's vocal works and those of his instrumental works. In the first, the expressive value of the music is exactly of the same order as that of the words. A pathetic poem would suggest to the composer some pages touching on the sublime (*On the River*, the *Lullaby*, *Death and the Mother*, the recitative of Pimen in *Boris Godunoff*). But if the feeling of the words were more banal, the music would not produce anything above the ordinary (see the Songs on the poems of Alexis Tolstoy); it is truculent or delicate, exuberant or dry, according to the

meaning and the quality of the words. If the text present contrasts, the music accentuates, and "underlines" as it were, each phrase (*Trépak, The Peasant's Cradle-Song*; let there be a great variety of inflections and of shades in the poem, the music has the same flexibility (*In the Nursery*); if it be a piece impregnated with monotony and tedium, it reproduces it with the special interest that it offers (*O my Savishna, The Orphan Beggar Child*); let it be merely a rhythmic suggestion, exact and continuous, it is seized upon and acquires a corresponding suppleness (*The Magpie, The Ragamuffin*).

The more efficient the sustenance of the idea, the more was Musorgsky at his ease in creating. It was there he had to find the atmosphere and the disposition of his music. But as soon as it was no longer a question of putting words to music, but of creating a piece of music by simply taking a subject for the foundation, Musorgsky experienced great difficulties. In spite of Balakireff's lessons, it was a great trouble to him to give form, however little extended, to his thoughts: the musical matter interested him, but not the form. And without form, there is no music. Further, musical form cannot be entirely conditioned by anything outside music;* and the musician, however precise

*It is apparently so however, where it seems that the arrangement of a work results from the purely literary idea (*Istar* of M. d'Indy, with its symphonic variations; *Antar* of M. Rimsky Korsakoff; *Mazeppa* by Liszt): but it is only superficial. In reality the form of such works, considered from the strictly musical point of view, always remains lucid and interesting—the word "form" being taken here in a general sense and not with the restricted acceptation implying conformity to a fixed model.

may be the suggestion that he obeys, must always create this form by a definite act of invention. Strictly speaking, it ought to be the same with the musical ideas and the figures. But here, an idea of the kind derived apart from music, a pretext for imitative or suggestive music, may contain suggestions so definite, that in the end the task of invention becomes reduced to the simple artistic reproduction of them.

One is often asked if music which pretends to reproduce (that is to describe or represent) be admissible on principle, and if it conform to the idea of Art which one holds. But are we not drawn away just a little from the point:—*Does music say anything? Does it represent anything, or not?* Let us put aside the first aspect of the question, as relevant to transcendental æsthetics and resolvable only by *a priori* arguments, and let us consider only the second aspect.

Music consists of three essential elements: sonority, rhythm, and emotion, the latter resulting from the nature of the first two. And it is according to the measure in which an extraneous musical subject offers material for the display of one of these elements that it is suitable for music. Of the three, it will be nearly always the emotion which will be suggested from an outside source. Music of which the inspiring subject bears only its emotional qualities (the order of succession may have been determined by it) is still almost "pure" music. The subject will be the simple excitation to creation; it will not govern the grouping

of the characters or of the themes, and will scarcely influence the sequence of the developments. This form of musical representation, which is that of Liszt's symphonic poem for example, was unknown to Musorgsky; for it bears too advanced a degree of autonomy.

When the two other elements, sonority and rhythm, come into play, the musical reproduction is more representative but still imitative or descriptive, as the case may be. These three terms: sonority, rhythm, expression, which are so often confused, and thus cause so much misunderstanding —have different meanings, and it is important to define each separately.

Music can only imitate sounds or sonorous rhythms; it can, however, give in sonority the equivalent of a quantity of non-sonorous rhythms, in which case it is better to call it "descriptive." Musical rhythm is based entirely on "time" or "pulse." Other rhythms, those of movement, are found together in time and space: they are mixed. Others too, those of form, are found, apparently at least entirely in space.* What is done, consciously or not, by all composers who wish to describe with any accuracy, is the translation of these rhythms into musical rhythms.

Human movement—gesture—has always furnished rhythmic models for music. Moreover, as

*Apparently only, because physiologically the perception of forms is not really visual; the eye cannot see the forms all at once, but by a series of displacements which puts the muscular sense into play. The rhythm of forms is thus in reality "mixed."

the gesture partakes of the natural language of the emotions, music will share with it an essential and intimate relation, the relation of expression. This is why one has often neglected to observe the material rhythmic relationships which exist none the less in fact. According to the particular temperament of the composer this descriptive music of the mimetic order, born of a subject offering suggestions of emotional movements and gestures, will be inspired emotionally. The rhythmic relationship may be adventitious ; or, on the contrary the rhythmic translation may have the predominant rôle, and the expression and emotion will only occupy a secondary place, resulting in the creation of an equivalent of the subject.

Thus conceived, this music, graphic before everything else, not pretending to rise by generalization above the subject which inspires it, cannot be better suited to the needs of an artist of realistic temperament, one who strives for immediate representation, and elaborates what he observes as little as possible. It is almost the only course which Musorgsky adopts in his instrumental works,* or at least in those that offer any interest.

On considering these works more closely, we shall see without doubt that the motive of imagination alone has been capable of producing the musical invention of the composer. Rhythmic

*Another kind of musical representation exists, but it is conventional and based entirely on the association of ideas. It is useless to explain in detail that Musorgsky, with his realistic style, was bound to ignore entirely this purely cerebral procedure.

translations, in fact, only furnish a musician with the unities, with the themes for development. The development should be autonomous. Musorgsky can then go much further; once his theme is obtained, he does not draw anything much from it on account of his incapacity for development, his lack of that sense of emotional effusion which produces musical work other than the faculty of translating rhythms. This is seen in the piece called *Bydlo* in the *Pictures from an Exhibition*, the theme of which is so poetic. Musorgsky's imagination cannot even state precisely a suggestion of indefinite rhythm (see *In the Tuileries*, and *The Market at Limoges* in the same volume). When the rhythmic suggestion is absent, this music is less interesting (see *The Old Castle*).

On the other hand, ideas of the mimetic order furnish Musorgsky with quite a succession of motive pictures, more or less co-ordinated, which, whilst sustaining his musical imagination almost as much as words would have done, no longer suggest to him merely simple elements, but appear as the framework also. His best instrumental pieces have no other origin. The story of the origin of his *Intermezzo* as quoted by Stassoff serves as an example of this :—

> " After 1870 Musorgsky repeatedly told me under the promise of secrecy, that this piece was " Russian," having been inspired by viewing a striking rustic scene. During the winter of 1861, on a certain feast-day in the country

a band of peasants crossed the fields, walking with much difficulty through the soft snow under a bright winter sun. It was beautiful, picturesque, serious, amusing, all at the same time. Suddenly a group of young country-women advanced along a smooth footpath of hard snow with song and laughter. This picture impressed itself on my mind in a musical form. The first melody of the piece which rises and falls *à la Bach*, was born spontaneously: the joyous laughter of the women suggested to me the theme of which I have made the Trio. But all this was *in modo classico* according to my musical habits then."

One cannot wish for a better example than this of the rôle of motive ideas in Musorgsky's musical invention. Let us note well that, however strongly the composer insists on these ideas, they only serve to inspire him with themes otherwise stylized in this species, and the form remains traditional. Musorgsky had not yet found himself. Here he scarcely proceeded any differently from Mozart's or Beethoven's method of inspiration, at any rate according to the biographies. Musorgsky is inspired by their rhythmic suggestions rather than by their emotions.

But it is chiefly the study of the interesting book of *Pictures from an Exhibition* which is significant in view of this tendency to graphic representation of movements and of gestures. The explanatory analysis which appears at the head of the original edition of the work is in itself very characteristic. Here it is word for word:—

"The motive which suggested the composition of the musical work *Pictures from an Exhibition* was the exhibition of drawings by the architect Victor Hartmann (1874) who up to his death had been an intimate friend of Musorgsky.

The Introduction bears the title *Promenade.*

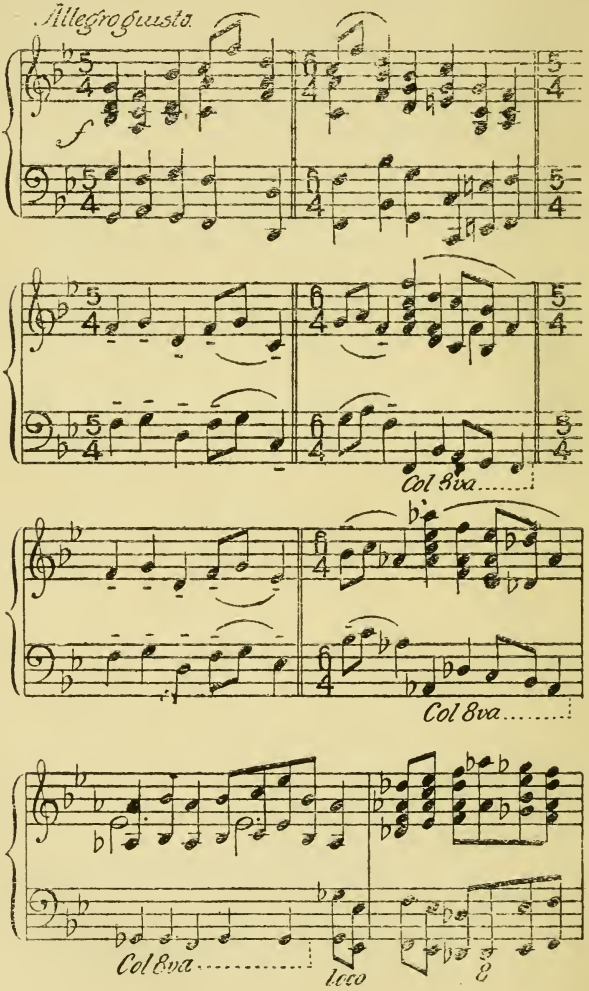
1. *Gnomus.* A drawing representing a little goblin taking crooked steps with his little misshapen legs.
2. *Il Vecchio Castello.* A mediæval castle beneath which a troubadour sings his song.
3. *At the Tuileries. Children quarrelling over their games.* A path in the gardens of the Tuileries, with a crowd of children and nurses.
4. *Bydlo.* A Polish cart with enormous wheels, drawn by oxen.
5. *Ballet of chickens in their shells.* A sketch by Hartmann for a stage scene in the ballet of *Trilby.*
6. *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuile.* Two Polish Jews, one prosperous, the other needy.
7. *Limoges. The Market.* Two women wrangling furiously in the market.
8. *The Catacombs.* In this drawing, Hartmann has represented himself visiting the Catacombs of Paris by lantern-light. (In his original manuscript, Musorgsky wrote beneath the section *Andante in B minor* :—" The creative spirit of the departed Hartmann leads me towards the skulls, and addresses them—a pale light radiates from the interior of the skulls.

9. *The Hut on Fowls' Legs.* The design by Hartmann for a clock in the shape of Baba-Yaga's hut. Baba-Yaga is the old witch of the children's legends. Musorgsky adds the witch's tracking along in her mortar.
10. *The Boyatyrs' Gate at Kieff.* Hartmann's design for the construction of an entrance gate for the city of Kieff, in the massive ancient Russian style. It has a cupola in the shape of a Slav helmet.

The Introduction, *Promenade,* which re-appears several times between the various pieces for the purpose of an Interlude, can be reckoned in the number of the most charming inspirations of Musorgsky's instrumental works. Here the rhythmic suggestion is exact and sustained ; " The composer has shown himself pacing here and there ; sometimes loitering, sometimes hastening to get nearer to a picture ; sometimes " adds Stassoff, " the joyful gait slackens—Musorgsky thinking mournfully of his dead friend." Plenty of intentions, we doubtless say, and in practice some are not realized without weaknesses. But the musical result remains no less interesting, even if one absolutely ignores all explanation, and the most exacting will acknowledge that when this condition is successfully carried out, the music is good, whether it be imitative, descriptive, or representative.

There can be nothing more subtle, more elastic, or more evocatory, than the phrases of the *Promenade* with their ingenious rhythms, well sustained, persistent, yet without monotony, thanks to the

variation of the shades of expression. For example:



Compare the piece *Gnome* with this *Promenade*; there again an irregular bar, dragging and springing in turn, evokes the picture in an expressive manner.

The sixth piece is a powerful illustration of the mimetic spirit. One cannot describe this striking musical picture better than by reproducing the words of M. Pierre d'Alheim :—

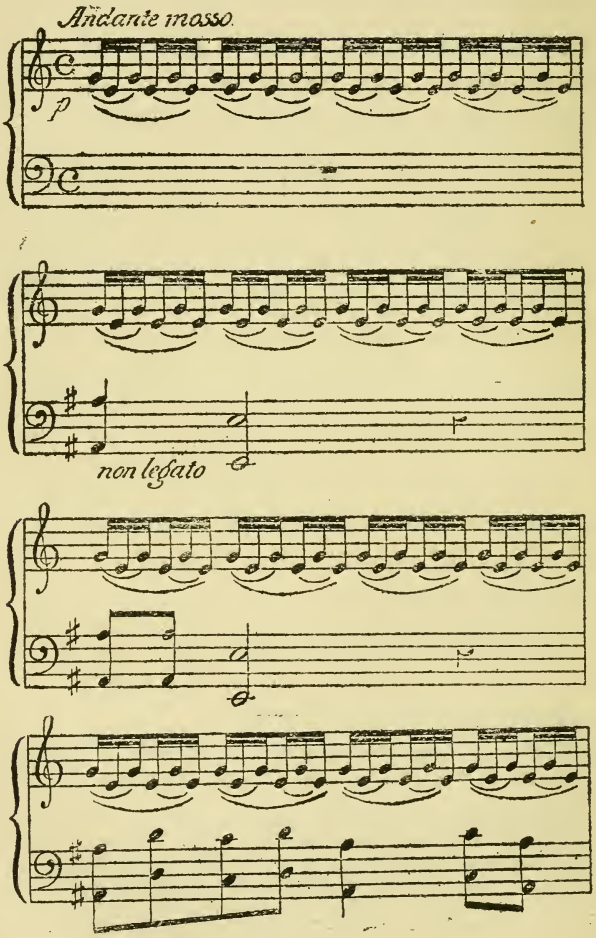
> "Two Jewish melodies, used antiphonally —one solemn, imposing, clearly defined—the other lively, quick, sprightly, and suppliant —set to work to portray the two personalities. The fat one struts about proudly like a pure-bred dog; the thin one is harassed, cringes, and has a face like a pug-dog. He moves quaintly, tries to catch the other's eye, begs. There is no doubt which is which—one can see them; and the snarling of the fat one who rids himself (in two triplets) of the importunate one, shows that Musorgsky can draw humorous effects from the piano as well as from the voice and from the orchestra."*

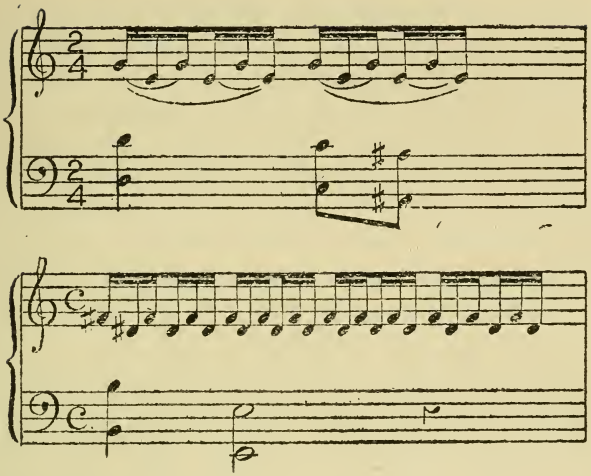
The Witch, (Baba-Yaga) in *The Hut* belongs for the greater part to the descriptive, picturesque class of the *Promenade* and of the *Gnome*. The middle part, however, *Andante mosso*, gives an example of purely musical suggestion, perhaps unique in the instrumental works of the composer.†

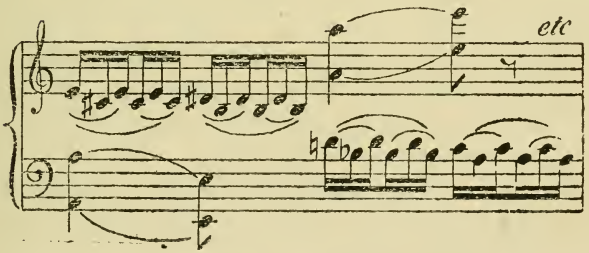
*P. d'Alheim, *Moussorgsky*, page 263.

†It should be noticed that this piece is the only one, after *The Night on the Bare Mountain*, where Musorgsky has made use of the fantastic creations of the national folk-lore so dear to nearly all his colleagues. They are themes for reveries and picturesque invention; and neither the dreamy, nor the picturesque elements of pure music are suited to Musorgsky's realistic temperament.

Everyone will feel the mysterious atmosphere of this episode :—





and further on :—

One can hardly discover an equivalent suggestion in the eighth number, where the subject would have been quite favourable. *The Catacombs* so-called (with the sub-title *Roman Sepulchres*) are reproduced by a series of sustained chords, sometimes played *pp*, sometimes *ff*, and only moderately expressive in spite of an evident

intention of seeking after sonority. Then comes under the title *Con mortuis in lingua mortua* (*sic*), a rhythmless transformation of the theme of the *Promenade*, with an ineffective high *tremolo*.

The final piece recommends itself by its analogous quest after sonority, being especially happy towards the end, in spite of evidently laborious writing. On the whole, the piece is perhaps more ambitious than successful. One must notice this fact concerning the last numbers—the rhythmic suggestions were less numerous and more vague. It is doubtless for the same reasons that other pages in the volume are weak; one can however smile at the grace of the little Ballet of Chickens in their shells; but the *Old Castle* is no more than mere platitudes. On the contrary the little piece entitled *Bydlo* is endowed with a penetrating poesy. Here the influence of the rhythmic suggestion is visible: the heavy basses which come lumbering along are in themselves characteristic: beneath them comes a theme of a labour song which becomes brighter towards the middle of the piece; and that is all; but it is moving. Here the emotion results more from the description, and one sees that the mere description of the subject has sufficed for Musorgsky without giving rein to a single moment's effusion or amplification of his piece by a *musically emotional* commentary. And the fact that, in all his instrumental works, he abstained from giving an autonomous life to the elements which he created, however concrete and plastic they were, allows us to state precisely how secondary is the

rôle of pure description, even in descriptive music; and how very essential to the constitution of all complete musical work is the rôle of free invention. But it remains no less true that the addition of an idea extraneous to music may be invaluable for the creation of the expressive elements of a work.

After the *Pictures from an Exhibition*, the *Night on the Bare Mountain* is the most developed of Musorgsky's instrumental compositions. This symphonic picture, repeatedly modified by the author, probably underwent numerous alterations on the advice of several of his colleagues, notably Rimsky-Korsakoff, who revised the orchestration. It is of very considerable importance, full of colour and movement; the themes are characteristic. Musorgsky well understood the imitative and descriptive elements required by the following programme:—

> "Subterranean sounds of supernatural voices. Appearance of the spirits of darkness, followed by that of the god Chernobog. Glorification of Chernobog aud the celebration of the Black Mass. The Sabbath Revels. At the height of the orgies, the bell of the little village church sounding in the distance disperses the spirits of darkness. Daybreak."

The form of the work is clear: A symphonic *Allegro* running into a short *Andante*. Assuming that the first version was not perceptibly inferior to the finished one, *The Night on the Bare Mountain* in 1867 was a significant creation. The Russian

school had scarcely then commenced the series of picturesque symphonic poems which we now know,* and Musorgsky by this very original production deserves to count amongst the number of innovators.†

In *The Night on The Bare Mountain*, it is the movements and the rhythms which supply the picturesque element ; the word " piquant " would be more exact, if it did not bear a diminutive meaning.

Musical " picturesqueness " in the etymological sense of the word, is rather rare in Musorgsky's instrumental works. It is not entirely absent from several of the short piano pieces which he brought back from his travels in the Crimea, notations rather than evocations ; *Gursuf* ; *On the Southern coast of Crimea* (*Capriccio*) ; *In the Village*. Although they may be rather awkwardly written, like nearly everything that Musorgsky composed for piano solo, they have considerable colour and verve. *Gursuf* recommends itself as a vivacious production of good quality ; the *Capriccio* is a curt little rhapsody, alertly treated ; in the opening of *To the Village*, there is a discreet and deep charm ; the ending unfortunately is banal.

*The poem *Sadko* (since revised) by Rimsky-Korsakoff was finished this same year. It was the first that he composed. *Thamar* by Balakireff was written some ten years later.

†The picturesqueness of *The Night on the Bare Mountain*, as in all Russian symphonic poems, is caused essentially by the quality of the themes and the tonal and rhythmic atmosphere. It is not a picturesqueness of arrangement, like that of the *Witches' Sabbath* in the *Fantastic Symphony*. However, Berlioz' work furnished the Russians with a precedent, if not a model.

The particular flavour which one notices in these pieces is due to the presence of oriental elements which Musorgsky (in strong contrast to his colleagues) so rarely employs; and his persistent disdain of one of the most cherished resources of the school is easily explained. Oriental music is, above all, sound for its own sake—material beauty—that is to say, the exact opposite of Musorgsky's ideal. The elements of oriental music are not plastic like those of the Russian national music, and consequently it cannot adapt itself to the expressive needs of the composer. And, besides, Musorgsky was incapable of adding anything to it in manipulation. Compare the *Persian Dances* of the opera *Khovanshchina* of which the themes are very beautiful, whilst the arrangement is somewhat poor and abbreviated, consisting only of a set of repetitions with slight alterations.*

Another instrumental dance, *Hopak*, destined to take its place in the score of *The Fair of Sorotchinsk*, ought to be counted amongst Musorgsky's best productions.

We can pass over two other small pieces: *A Tear* and *A Meditation*, which do not offer the slightest interest; likewise a little Scherzo, also for the piano, entitled *The Sempstress*, where in a somewhat mediocre piece, some pretty details appear. We also pass over the *Children's Play*,

*In comparing these with the *Dances Polovtsiennes* of *Prince Igor* by Borodin, one sees that the art of the composer can add considerable value and interest by an able disposition of a similar *ensemble* of elements.

a gracious sketch of some elegance, and the *Scherzo in B minor* likewise, of which the *Trio* however, is poetic and very well done. The study of these works does not need any further analytical writing, and it is sufficient to have mentioned them.

It is under quite another aspect that we must now consider Musorgsky—that of becoming more closely acquainted not only with his peculiar idiosyncracy, but more particularly with his creative genius.

CHAPTER V

SONGS AND CHORAL WORKS

THE study of Musorgsky's instrumental works is necessarily limited in several ways on account of the special character and the small number of his works. His songs on the contrary are numerous as well as diverse. Musorgsky is no longer hindered by his unwillingness to give to the music an autonomous conduct, nor by the absence of direct and continuous matter for translation into music, seeing that the text offers both the suggestions and the framework which are indispensible to him. He can then musically express the most varied emotions, and he usually does so with an incomparable power, by new, direct, simple, and appropriate means, proving by this that, without being either independent or served by acquired knowledge, his faculty of musical creation is no less rich and capable of manifestation. And whoever will familiarize himself with the group of forty odd songs left by Musorgsky, is bound to acknowledge a truth confirmed by the study of *Khovanshchina*, and above all of *Boris Godunoff*. Musorgsky must be counted amongst the number of the greatest musical inventors, amongst those who have expressed in the most penetrating manner the deepest artistic emotions.

So varied is the cycle of these songs that it is scarcely possible to consider them as a whole, or even to undertake a systematic classification. However, the analysis of the elements of inspirations which each text offers, of the method of composition, and of the result which the artist attained, will allow us to recognise in some measure the stability of the æsthetic principles which guided him.

We have seen that Musorgsky, in the matter of vocal music, tried chiefly to obtain an exact equivalent to the natural spoken word; continuous or broken, varied or monotonous, slow or quick, the prescribed course is exactly that which the character whom he treats, would adopt instinctively in the natural way of speaking. The examination of his instrumental music has revealed the existence of another essentially realistic method—the graphic representation by rhythm, by movement, and by characteristic gesture—that which has been called "mimetic music." This method will be found frequently in his songs, and may occasionally be the dominant feature. But the purely musical expression, dependent on the intrinsic quality of the sounds, of their dynamic, melodic and harmonic relations as well as of the rhythm—that is to say, the very essential element of the music, so frequently absent (for reasons already stated) from Musorgsky's instrumental works, will play an important rôle here. It may be contained in the melodic line, directly suggested by the words, or may even be inspired, in a less direct manner;

in which case Musorgsky, having only to express it at the moment where it occurs, without being obliged to prolong the expression or to develop it, presents it freely and fully. By being thus concentrated, it becomes more intense.

This preliminary definition, in conformance with the principle of the " minimum of stylization " established in the preceding chapter, allows us to suppose that musically, Musorgsky's songs have no form ; that the only unity is that which results from the coherence of the words. In the strict sense of the word, this is true of a certain number of songs and these the least beautiful. Quotations from some of those where the composer has purposely adopted either the lines of a folk-song, or the continuity of the *lied* form, would offer aspects less reducible to unity than one would imagine. There is not often any tonal relation between the beginning and the end—although it is rare to find a modulation which shocks the artistic sense, for with Musorgsky, the limits of tonality are both wide and elastic.

Sometimes the same song allows two distinct parts, without any musical connection, (*The Peasant's Cradle-Song*). *The Trépak* is analogous, but there the reappearance of the first theme establishes an organic unity. The form, after all, remains free and is comparable, for example, with that of Liszt's *Mazeppa* (Variations and March) or his own *Night on the Bare Mountain* (*Allegro*, and *Andante*). But occasionally a large number of heterogenous elements are associated in one

short piece (the third song in the suite *Sunless*; the second of *In the Nursery*; the *Field-Marshal Death*, the latter more developed); the characteristic expression, renewed as required, is the only rule which Musorgsky observes. But it may happen that the text demands perhaps a certain regularity of periods, or a certain return of the expressional means. Care for an exact realism may even lead the composer to adopt strictly a continuity which will yield the most impeccable musical unity: (*O my Savishna, The Ragamuffin*). Again the conclusion of the text may demand a reappearance of the opening part, and once more we shall find the form regular (*On the Banks of the Don*, and *The Hobby Horse*). All this is logical conformity to the exigencies of artistic truth. When Musorgsky violates a rule, it is with this supreme justification and the people to disagree with him will be those "Judges of Art . . . . who invoke form with loud cries, whilst the artist is occupied in freely creating."*

A large number of Musorgsky's vocal pieces are of a popular character, in the real sense of the word. That is to say, the artist locates the scene and causes the humble *moujiks* whom he considers "such true types of humanity" to speak there. The people in the mass is likewise the essential personage in all Musorgsky's works, this inspiring force of his art remaining instinctive, rough, simple, just as it is in the folk-art itself.

This is not entirely a result of the realistic ideas

*Richard Wagner: *Letter on Liszt's Symphonic Poem.*

which guided him. Dargomisky with the same æsthetic ideal, was never so attracted to the representation of types taken from the mob. The "Five" on the contrary (amongst whom Musorgsky is the only realist) have all more or less inclined towards an exclusively national art, as much by its resources as by its object; that is to say, they wished to draw the elements of their musical language from popular Russian art, and to represent national subjects. The surroundings in which he lived then may have influenced Musorgsky to some degree, but not sufficiently to account for the predominance of the mob as the chief character in his works.

The cultured sympathy of the artist for the country people amongst whom he lived for so long, coupled with his extraordinary faculties of observation and of power of fixing the types, is the twofold cause of the truth, of the intensity which distinguishes the popular types contained in his work.

But apart from the fidelity of the musical characteristic, as of the communicative quality of the emotion which animates him, he brings into play a particular method of composition to which one alludes every time the Russian school is mentioned, without always clearly defining or limiting the rôle. This consists precisely of borrowing material elements from the musical folk-lore.

The borrowing can be of various kinds. In a general manner, the appropriate "modes" of the popular music with the harmonic flavour resulting

from these, the inherent melodic inflections of the so-called idiom which forms this music, cannot at first pass into the language of the national artists without appearing in the eyes of the world a little guilty of imitating folk-music. These modes of expression being so apt for the reproduction of racial artistic feelings, it is only natural to find them again with the artists belonging to that race : it would be strange if one did not find them. A more direct example is the freedom of the folk-music ; in its most natural form, the artistic instinct does not incline to complex stylizations ; the peasant knows of no intermediate forms between the monotonous repetition of a melodic fragment, the tune for a dance, and the absolutely free melody of the expressive improvisation. At the same time, in the first case, he nearly always ignores too rigid a symmetry. By such a course, his art offers the sure antidote against the constraint of an art too formalized, one which in the long run produces "schools."

These so-called borrowings made by the artist can only be of two kinds : he can produce the general movement, the charm and swing of a song or of a dance (the word *form* would be too ambitious) ; or he can reproduce the themes, just as they are. This utilisation of musical themes in full has been a subject of reproach levelled sometimes very vehemently against the Russian "national" musicians. We may omit Musorgsky's purely instrumental music from this discussion, as it furnishes us with no use of folk-song. In vocal

music, the essential condition, the only one, is that the expression should be direct and striking, without offending the æsthetic sense. This position granted, then the composer who knows how to utilize a folk-tune appropriately, where the musical quality is agreeable to the demands of expression, how to set it into position in such a way that everything surrounding it continues to correspond, performs a truly artistic act. It is not for want of being able to invent a better that he thus takes possession of a known theme instead of inventing one. To choose in that way a suitable element of expression is a task equal to that of creating one; a musician without genius would not know how to do one or the other; an intelligent listener will never confuse a superficial quotation from a popular theme with the incorporation of this theme into the very substance of a work.

Musorgsky, in some of his compositions has used themes drawn from musical folk-lore, note for note. For example, in *Boris Godunoff*, in the scene of the Coronation, there is a traditional Triumphal Song which appears in Pratsch's collection;* in the fifth act of this opera, there is an air borrowed from the repertory of the famous folk-singer Riabinin.† But it would be idle to make a list of the borrowings, besides making rather dull reading.

It more frequently happens that Musorgsky,

*It is one of the Russian themes used by Beethoven in his Opus 59; Rimsky-Korsakoff has used the same theme with the same purpose as Musorgsky, in Act I of the *Tzar's Bride*.

†For Riabinin, see Rambaud: *La Russe epique*, page 8.

like his brothers in art, creates these themes of which the character so nearly recalls the folk themes, that it is difficult to say whether they are invented or borrowed ; it is useless to seek a better proof of the fact that, in either case, the artistic convention remains the same. If it were only a factitious adaptation, or a direct imitation, one would always have the impression of something artificial, or incongruous. The contrary result proves the legitimacy, the excellence even, of the method, whatever the procedure may be.

Only their unity of spirit permits an approach to Musorgsky's varied " people's songs," when grouped under this collective title. There are some which are, however, by their general character, real songs, with strongly defined, more or less symmetrical melodic outlines, not *melos*—in free rhythm ; they have then, like the folk-songs themselves, a certain character of instinctive lyricism.* Musorgsky does not depart from the usual domain of the *lied*. In this class, where we must consider the æsthetic value of the music even more than look for particular modes of expression, we must place the admirable song *Hopak* in the first rank. Passionate, highly coloured, it is a masterly piece of music, uniform in move-

*This is not a contradiction of what has been said before ; the popular songs are all more or less stylized, either by the amplitude given to the melodic inflection, or by the elementary symmetry. A certain stylization, in fact, is present in the most rudimentary stages of artistic elaboration.

ment, and expressive in character, rather than picturesque. One notices an almost equal degree of stylization in the song *To the Mushrooms*, and there is scarcely less in *Eremuska's Cradle-Song*, or in *Kallistrate*. In these various pieces, the part played by the melodic treatment has its origin in a general expressive intention, rather than in the necessity for adopting a fixed mode of expression in order to obtain the characteristic realism, as Musorgsky did in other pieces on popular subjects: (*O my Savishna*, *The Orphan Beggar Child*, and *The Ragamuffin*). The method is more analogous to that employed in purely instrumental music; but a study of *The Ragamuffin*, for example, shows that the difference exists rather in the point of departure than in the result.

Here the purely musical expression has sufficed for the composer's realistic requirements; by that alone he conjures up in a vivid manner the passionate *moujik* of the *Hopak*; the mixture of love and hate which surges up from the heart of the mushroom-gatherer; the sad and almost hopeless resignation of Eremuska's mother; the smiling nature and high spirits of the bare-footed philosopher *Kallistrate*.

However, all the texts do not favour such a simple treatment. In order to realize by his music the most intense, and at the same time the most truthful expression, Musorgsky is often obliged to have recourse to the most varied elements; he does it without scruple, for he is an artist for whom the intrinsic musical unity counts as nothing

compared with the reward of the unity which results from the continuous adaptation of the music to the words. The most beautiful example of this, which one can quote, is the *Peasant's Cradle-Song*.

It is necessary to analyse this amazing piece almost from beginning to end, to show to what degree the expression is intensified at every point, by the opportune use of a new method.

One hearing suffices to reveal its perfect unity. The general tendency is lyrical; the vocal part forms a clear melodic line which has nothing of the recitative about it; but the words are most subtly scanned, the expressive accents are most minutely strengthened. The accompaniment is shared by the voice, which it doubles almost throughout (except in the last part) and consequently it has the same musical grip and the same expressive, specific, and very varied character.

At the beginning, a lulling motive, a gently swinging rhythm, tenderly expressive, underlies the first words: "Bye-bye, gently rest, O peasant's child." Then, just as the mother begins to dream of the tragic lot of the poor, some new musical phrases appear; "In former times our fathers knew no sorrow—then came misery; bringing with it still more misery." In four bars, the two opposite sentiments contained in these two lines follow one another, each as characteristically expressed as the other. Further on, when the mother sings the words: "We must forget our misery by ceaseless work which tires and breaks,"

the music, menacingly rousing, sounds a veritable song of revolt. Suddenly, it becomes calm again; for a brief moment the voice is silent, things become mystic, ethereal, in order to accompany the conclusion: "Your little white body rests in its cradle; your lily white soul has flown to heaven. God will protect your infant slumber; snow-white angels will watch by your pillow." The piece is unique, as much by its beauty as by the daring concentration which it affords. It constitutes one of the most decisive testimonies of genius that the musician had ever given us.

When the words do not give a similar opportunity for the play of a purely musical lyrical expression Musorgsky is still more particularly careful to realize the equivalence of the inflections of the spoken word, and to re-inforce their expressive value, without extension or development; he then performs the work of the pure realist. The case is very apparent in those pieces which consist of a perfectly free recitative; for example, *With Nanny* (*In the Nursery*); it is less noticeable at first in *The Orphan Beggar Child*, and in *O my Savishna*, where the part taken by the rhythm continues in force from beginning to end. But there, it is completely the realistic instinct which forces the composer to present the song in a uniform flow. The starving beggar-child whines his monotonous moan, almost without accent, and without taking breath: "O good sir, have pity, kind sir, pity a poor orphan who has no fire nor friends! Cold only has warmed me, hunger only has nour-

ished me." And so the touching supplication goes on until at last it stops abruptly on an unresolved chord of the dominant.*
The music here pourtrays the hardheartedness of the passer by, who leaves the child unaided.

Similar in spirit is the monologue of the poor village idiot, who babbles his amorous supplication:-

O my Savishna,
My bright falcon fair,
Love and cherish me,
I do beg of thee
Poor and weak I be,
Yet I worship thee.

We do not miss any purely musical adornment: it would in fact only have lessened the depth of the expression. Here music abdicates nearly all its own rights, and, according to Musorgsky's ideal, does no more than merely underline and strengthen the expressive character of the words. Let the reader make the experiment of taking away the words from all these songs already mentioned, and try the music alone. Neither *O my Savishna* nor *The Orphan Beggar-Child* will bear this test, which has no æsthetic or practical signification however, except as a means of analysis.

It is interesting to compare *The Ragamuffin* with these two songs. There we notice, for a similar reason, the same uniformity of method; a street urchin pursues an old woman, and subjects her to a string of mocking epithets: " Hello, old

*It is useless to comment on the wonderful truth of this realism

Grandmother. Stay, my good friend. Longing to see you! Turn you round! O you old woman with hooked nose, hair all white, and great, round eyes! Come and kiss me!" The method remains the same in principle, right up to the very moment when the old woman seizes him and thrashes him soundly. However, it is to be noticed that the galloping of the young urchin round his victim, and his exuberant gestures, furnish Musorgsky with an exact and continuous rhythmic suggestion of exactly the kind best suited to stimulate his musical invention. And so it comes about that *The Ragamuffin* is one of his most realistic songs, and one at the same time so homogeneous that it would make a delightful instrumental *Scherzo*.

These few examples suffice to show that Musorgsky's realistic method brings about the happiest, and the most varied results, when the method is applied to the composition of vocal music. They permit us also to see how far it can contribute to the elaboration of a completely independent work. We notice there how the music may either have an autonomous expression, or may become the docile auxiliary of the word-expression. In *The Ragamuffin*, the method provides a mimetic translation of the characteristic rhythms of the subject, as it does in most of Musorgsky's instrumental pieces. The same methods of composition are to be found, applied according to the demands of the words, in the composer's other songs, but notably in the seven little pieces forming the marvellous little collection, *In the Nursery*.

In the Nursery is Musorgsky at his best; it is the complete Musorgsky. The work was so true, exact, and so original, so finished and communicative, that its success was at once unanimous; and this collection alone was sufficient to make the author well-known, even amongst those who were ignorant of all the rest of his productions. No task could be more suitable to an artist of his particular character, than that of reproducing exactly, minutely and soberly, the various events of child-life, noting the thousand inflections of the fresh little voice, so sincere and quick to express joy, surprise or anger, vivacity or weariness. To do this, there is no need for a complex art; perfection can only be attained by a supreme ingenuity, prompted by a faculty exceptionally experienced in perceiving and noting down such things.

Each of the tiny little scenes is a miniature comedy, or a small complete drama, very special in character. At the opening, the child is seated near Nanny, the nurse. He asks for a lovely story, about the dreadful bogie-man, who prowls about the lonely woods, carrying away little children, and gnawing their little white bones. . . . Or even that about the lame king, who, whenever he slipped down, caused a mushroom to spring from the ground, and of the queen whose sneeze was so loud that she broke all the windows. . . . Then, left alone for a moment, the child upsets the work-table; the wool is all tangled, the stitches are dropped, the ink is spilt on the knitting:

"Now then, into the corner!" orders Nanny. And a protestation, at first very coaxing, quickly sulky, comes: "I've done nothing, Nanny dear! I havn't touched your stocking, Nanny! It was the kitten who has pulled the needles out. Mishenka has been very good; Nanny is a bad old thing. She's got a very dirty face. Misha will never love his unkind Nanny any more, so there!"

There is a story of a large cockchafer which falls from the tree on to his little toy cottage; it flies at him, hits his face, and then falls to the ground, motionless, still: "He hit me, and he fell; what then has happened to the cockchafer?" Or it is a little girl rocking her dolly: "Bye-bye, dolly, go to sleep. Dolly sleep! Bogie-man will come, or the grey wolf will take her and carry her away into the dark forest. Dolly, go to sleep! Tell me what you see in your sleep; the enchanted isles where beautiful fruits grow and ripen, where day and night, golden canaries sing. Bye-bye, dolly!"

Again, in *The Evening Prayer*, the child solemnly begins: "Bless, O Lord, Daddy and Mummy, and take care of them! Bless, O Lord, brother Vassenka and brother Mishenka. . . ." and so on. Then, as sleep overtakes him, the utterance becomes faster and confused, so much so, that Nanny is obliged to dictate the last words, which the child repeats obediently.

Then we have a little rider on a hobby-horse; he gallops, he screams, he goes to pay a visit to a friend, sets off at full gallop, he falls and hurts his

leg. His mother hastens to comfort him, and in a minute he is off again, faster than ever, to make up for lost time.

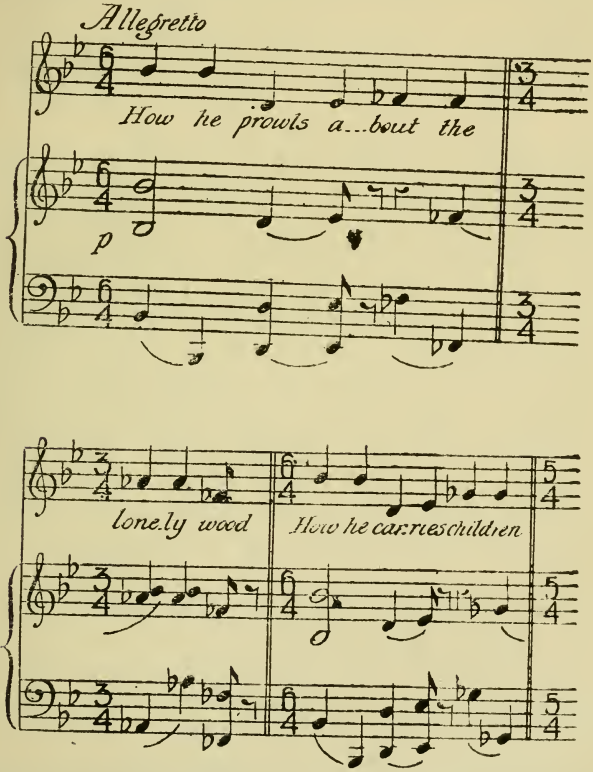
Lastly, comes a very tragic story, more tragic even than the story of the cockchafer. The child has seen the pussy on top of the bird-cage. Just at the moment when the frightened bird is almost caught, he rushes and strikes a hard blow at the cat. The cage was hard, and he hurts his fingers: "But what a naughty cat, Mamma! Eh?"

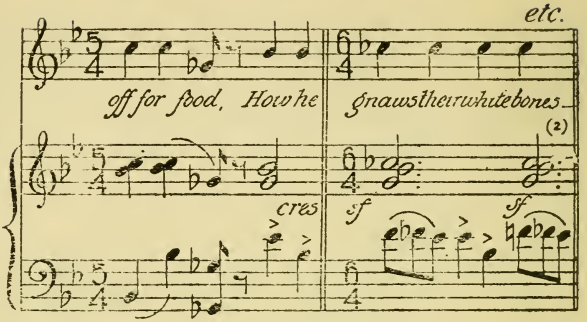
The words of these marvellous little scenes, written by Musorgsky himself* show, in a small measure it is true, the rightness of such musical evocation. These words always illustrate a thing done in a very exact and vivid way. To say that the music is in every way worthy of the words, is the only adequate commentary. Musorgsky, showing himself here deeply sympathetic, moved, and discerning, accomplishes miracles of evocatory truth. An analysis of the methods of composition would run the risk of spoiling the work, of only describing all this infinite delicacy in a clumsy way. Nevertheless how varied are the methods which we see here used by Musorgsky! How typical of his style are all the forms he uses here!

What strikes one at first is the appropriateness of every accent, of every beat, of every melodic turn; the shades of a medium so gentle and expressive as the child's voice seem to defy all at-

*As was the case also with *Savishna*, with *The Orphan Beggar-child*, and *The Ragamuffin* and in general with all the most characteristically realistic of his compositions.

tempts to reproduce them in music. One is astounded at the result which Musorgsky has attained. The striking appropriateness of the declamatory method constitutes nearly the whole interest of *With Nanny.** The following extract is typical :—



*This little piece is famous for the twenty-seven changes of time-signature contained in fifty-three bars.

One sees nothing which resembles so-called musical treatment in the songs entitled *In the Corner*, *The Evening Prayer* ; there is no independent melody of real significance ; nothing the least eurythmic in the arrangement. The accompaniment of *In the Corner* is entirely mimetic, suggesting every movement and gesture of the two talkers, whilst, at the same time, giving effect to their dialogue. That of *With Nanny* presents by phrases of the clearest and simplest type, the rhythmic evocations of the bogie-man, of the king who hobbles, of the queen who sneezes, the analogies of which will be found in such reproductions contained in the *Pictures from an Exhibition* (*The Gnome*, *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuile*, etc.). The opening of *The Evening Prayer* evokes at once the atmosphere of the peaceful scene. And this again is worthy of notice : the great trouble for the little girl is to *say* her prayers ; the act does

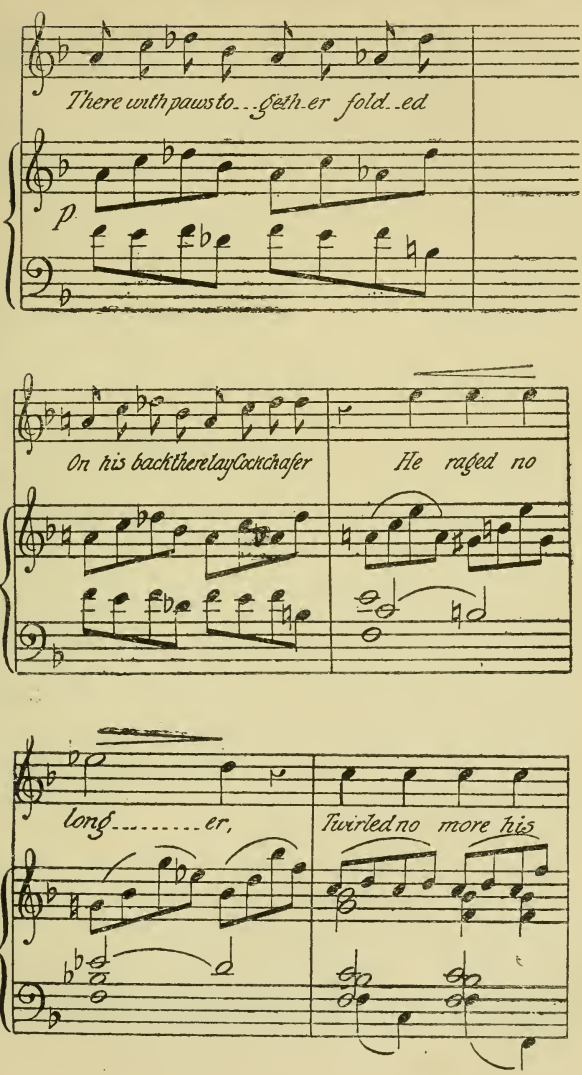
(2) The English words of all the songs from *In the Nursery* are taken from Miss Elizabeth M. Lockwood's translation, by permission of Messrs. Augener Ltd.

not awaken her imagination any more than, for instance, that of rocking her doll. Let the complete musical picture be just the least bit forced however, and it will be contrary to truth. But if he is agitated by the appearance of the cockchafer, the child receives precisely the same sensation ; his little mind is terrified ; he imagines it to be something enormous, and consequently the music can with good reason—without going to extremes—rise almost to a veritable paroxysm.

In all similar cases, Musorgsky's tact is a sure guide ; he abstains from adding the commentary of the artist's personal emotion to the subject ; only those who can feel the being which is evoked can experience the direct expression from the part taken by realistic treatment. Thus in *With Nanny*, *In the Corner*, *The Evening Prayer*, as in *The Orphan Beggar Child*, or *Savishna*,* is it not the *music* which begets the æsthetic pleasure ? An adequate reproduction of the subject suffices to arouse one's feelings just as much as the actual subject itself would do.† Again the music will hold its own on every occasion that the part taken by the treatment of the subject will allow it ; for

*Both the village idiot and the orphan, at the moment when they speak, do not wait to contemplate their sufferings ; they have only one object—to convince by their plea.

†Whilst the commentary would appear to be excessive, that the moderation of the suggestions in *With Nanny* are explained quite easily in a manner compatible with the thesis advanced here about *The Cockchafer* ; the thing seen always makes more impression on the child than the same thing told. And we know on the other hand that with Musorgsky the precise graphic model can alone produce a characteristic enunciation.

example, where the arrangements of the words will permit some symmetry in the musical construction (*The Cockchafer*, the *Dolly's Cradle-Song*, the *Hobby Horse*), and where the needs of expression allow a more sustained melodic quality for the voice or for the accompaniment. In *The Cat and the Birdcage*, the style of the recitative is amplified by the importance of the events to be narrated; the accompaniments suggest both the movements in the scene, and its tense atmosphere. In *The Hobby Horse*, the rhythmic precision of the idea helps to accentuate the characteristic charm of the music; the middle part (the child's fall) is realized in the same spirit evidenced in *With Nanny*, or *In the Corner;* so well indeed, that, thanks to the words, the whole becomes almost a distinct form. Still more highly constructed and more intrinsically musical is *The Cockchafer* (which M. Bellaigue has so happily called: "a Pythian gnome in miniature"). In order to reproduce the complete psychology of his little hero, Musorgsky is obliged to have recourse to the most subtle artistic means. In the opening, when the child plays peacefully, and again at the end, particularly when he contemplates with astonishment the motionless *Cockchafer*, and is seized with uneasiness, almost facing the mystery of the great problem of death, there are moments of the most intense and rarest musical atmosphere, when one almost longs to make comparisons with Debussy's *Pelléas et Melisande*.

There with paws to...geth-er fold-ed
p
On his back there lay Cockchafer
He raged no
long.....er,
Twirled no more his

During the description of this adventure, the sharpest of harmonies and the strongest of rhythms clash one against the other.

Lastly, it is from pure lyricism that the *Dolly's Cradle-Song* springs. In it the music represents the thoughts floating through the little girl's mind, the vague vision of the enchanted island, at the same time as the warm feeling of the little arms tightly clasped around her dolly.

An exquisite *Child's Song*, published separately, connects itself naturally with *The Nursery* series; the words are by the poet Mey.

Musorgsky has composed a certain number of vocal pieces of very special character, being veritable caricatures—vocalized satires. Such pieces, having mere amusement for their object, need only be considered as works of art, if they possess the whole quality by which farce can be made apparent in art, if they be characteristic, or contain synthetic, specific, and concrete notation, which widen the field on their own account. Such an example as *The Ragamuffin*, is in a certain measure merely a simple character sketch. But this quality exists only in very uneven degree in the various pieces which are now to be considered.

Conceit offers an excellent example of pure caricature. In this, the words are by Alexis Tolstoy; (those of all the other pieces of the same kind are by Musorgsky). Conceit personified, swaggers along and not only puffs himself out to a height of an *archin* and a quarter, but his hat

measures quite a full *sagene.** He refuses to go to see his father and his mother, because their door is not properly varnished! He would willingly go to pray in the church, but the floor is not kept swept. He sees before him a rainbow; he turns on his heels: "It is not meet for me to bend under that bow," he cries. The picture is well arranged; the musician knows how to add telling things without distortion.

But the suitable application of Musorgsky's habitual procedures offers not the least hindrance; the accompaniment reproduces the pompous strutting of the young dandy; the inflections of the words are accentuated even to excess. The *pianissimi* and the *fortissimi* alternate violently, shaded by the increase of expression marks, underlined with care, *Pomposo, Semplice, Senza espressione, Marziale.* But it is not that alone which gives the music the intrinsic character of drollery which is contained in the words. To put it briefly, the music brings the real character into stronger relief.

The musical interest of the satire *The Classicist,* is very feeble. Musorgsky intended to represent a reactionary old pedagogue in the act of intoning his artistic creed: "I am clear, lucid, modest, simple, courteous: how admired I am! A perfect classicist, full of tact, highly polished. I despise modern ingénuity; I make war on all innovators; their noise, their disorder, their uproar frightens me, for I foresee the death of art. . . . As for me,

*That is, the little man can stretch himself only to a yard and a quarter, whilst his hat measures ten yards.

I am clear, I am modest, etc." The realization of the music is altogether the most ingenious of parodies ; a piece of imitation in the classical style, with four real parts, very correct, the most foolish melodic graces in the world, two or three dramatic impressions and the traditional return of the first part. And it so happens that all this intentional piff-paff so carefully thought out, so affected, so emasculated, forms a striking mimetic evocation of the demeanour, the posing, and gesturing of a silly, old academician. It justifies the means, childish as they may seem, by being so perfectly appropriate to the object.

By the side of *The Classicist*, ought to be placed the long vocal scene called *The Musician's Puppet-Show*. But here Musorgsky's intentions are complex. Allusions abound, and, if we cannot understand these, we shall find the greater part of this composition very poor stuff. Much more than *The Classicist* (where however, Musorgsky has wished to caricature the critic Famintsin) it is a piece of real life, and of definite circumstances. To enjoy it in proportion to the merit it deserves, it is imperative to read the long explanation which Stassoff gives of it :—

> " A marionette showman invites the crowd to walk into his booth to see his collection of funny little people. The first is Zaremba (at that time Director of the Conservatoire) who sings a parady of a classical air (from Handel's *Samson*) : ' The minor mode,' he says ' is original sin ; in the major is redemption.' (Zaremba

belonged to a pious sect and gladly converted his pupils to his beliefs). The second is Fifi (in reality, Théophile Tolstoy) an indifferent musical critic, and a fanatic admirer of the Italian music. He sings to a very commonplace waltz tune, with ridiculous embellishments : ' Patti, the beautiful, the gracious, the adorable.' Nor is there wanting a reference to Patti's flaxen wig, about which the critic had lamented in one article. Then, represented by a melody drawn from one of his own songs, the critic Famintsin (already pilloried in *The Classicist*) speaks of the law-suit which he intends to bring against a fellow critic (Stassoff). The last personage to appear is the composer-critic Séroff. His entry is accompanied by a theme taken from his opera *Rognéda* : ' Quick ! An arm chair for this genius ! He has nowhere to sit down ! ' cries the showman. (Séroff was offended because he had no seat reserved for him at the Russian Musical Society's Concerts). ' Will someone invite him to dinner ? ' (He was furious at not having been invited to a banquet given in honour of Berlioz), and so on. . . . . Then the thunder growls, and the goddess Euterpe (that is to say, the Grand Duchess Helen Pavlovna, Patroness of the Conservatoire and a great supporter of classical music) descends from heaven. The four critics prostrate themselves in adoration, begging her to shower on them a rain of gold, in exchange for which they will sing her glory."

These constant allusions, essential elements of the work though they be, are also the weak part of it, if one looks at it from the view of genuine art. However, perhaps the very excess of the accusation gives the piece an intrinsic value, and thus raises Musorgsky almost to the level of a Chabrier. It is impossible not to laugh at the brilliant sallies with which the stale waltz tune is trolled out: "O Patti, Patti, Pa-pa-pa-Patti, Patti! That wig!" or when Séroff enters, puffed up with conceit and foaming at the mouth. It is not art perhaps; but here Musorgsky did not intend to create art. His only ambition was to caricature, to lash out, to amuse; and he has completely succeeded. The method partakes of mimetic evocation, and the simple music merely paradies. The words contain the chief interest; the musical humour is obtained by stereotyped musical means, and by accentuating the strange characters of these people, already fools by themselves; or, by a contrary method, (for example, at the beginning) he affects a stolid gravity.

We can hardly take more seriously the little "story in music" called *The Goat*, an imaginary tale. It is a simple little sketch, as cleverly worked out as could be wished. The words can be summed up thus: "A young girl goes for a walk; she sees a horrid old goat, and runs away terrified. . . In the second verse the girl is going to church; she is to be married. The husband is old and terrifying. Is she frightened? No; she is gentle and wheedling." All this scarcely asks for music.

Musorgsky has been able to imitate the elegant grace of the girl, the heavy and weird hobbling of the old man. He has succeeded in accentuating by musical comparisons the comical contrast of the two reverse situations. But the whole is a *genre* picture of little significance. Its humour apparently appeals to a Russian mind, however; for Stassoff does not hesitate to declare; "If such charming things as *The Goat* are simply rubbish then Gogol's *The Open Carriage*, *The Nose*, and *The Cloak*, ought not to be taken seriously either. And Mr. Pierre d'Alheim, a clever commentator, defines Russian humour thus:—"The Russian is a child, a good child. If he wishes to laugh, he laughs at a fly flying; he laughs becauses it cleanses the brain. The Russian language does not favour any word play. Laughter is bestowed on everything and on everybody. This is its chief point, and it hurts no one; its stabs are no more than mere pin-pricks; they never give a knock-down blow.

There is no need however to be a Russian to understand the inimitable drollery of the distracted *Seminarist*, who muddles his amorous preoccupations with the interminable list of Latin substantives of the second declension. It is not one of Musorgsky's best productions; still it is not without value. The intonations are noted in a very amusing way; the music intentionally offers the aspect of a mixture of themes from songs and rounds, joined together haphazardly; it is a very happy piece of musical fun.

After having thus studied the different aspects

of Musorgsky's realistic art, it remains to examine the series of works where the artist, almost overstepping the limits of realism, endeavours to express rather than to specify, to invent rather than to reproduce, and consequently performs a purely musical act. This group of works is distinguished by certain material differences; the music being more autonomous, aims at moving us by its melodic curves, its rhythms, its harmonies, the relations of its phrases, quite as much as, if not more than, by its character. It may even happen that it is stylized to some measure, whilst preserving the very direct, carefully graded expressive power which Musorgsky never ignores. Certainly in this category of the composer's works, everything is not of equal quality; pure inspiration, the faculty of artistic conception, may be lacking much more than the faculties of observation and of notation. And Musorgsky—most happily for his genius—did not possess this talent of arranging to advantage mediocre inspirations, thus endowing them with a superficial appearance of beauty. In fact, the weakest songs which he has written belong to this purely lyrical kind; there are also a few of his masterpieces.

The chief drawback to art classifications is that they are too strict: thus some of the songs which have been studied above from the realistic point of view which they afford, have also this character of intrinsic musicality defined in the preceding paragraph; thus, for the nature of the melodic and harmonic invention, take *The Peasant's Cradle-*

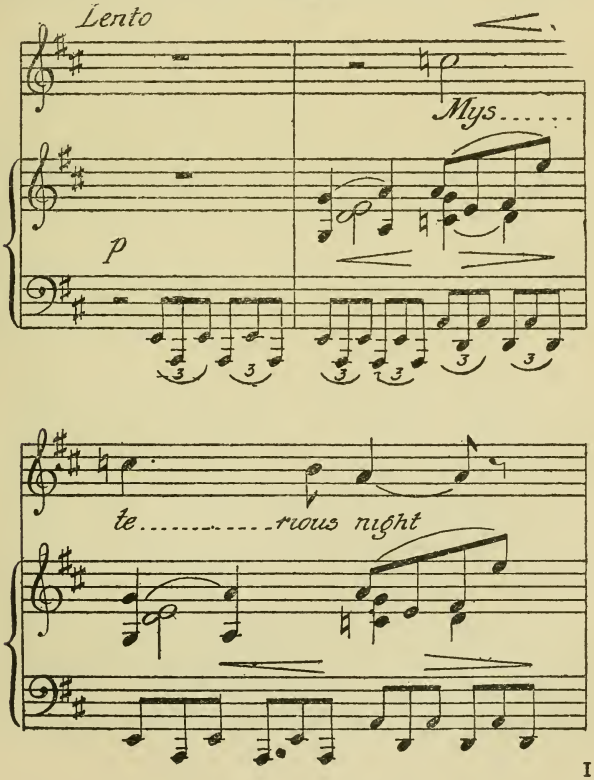
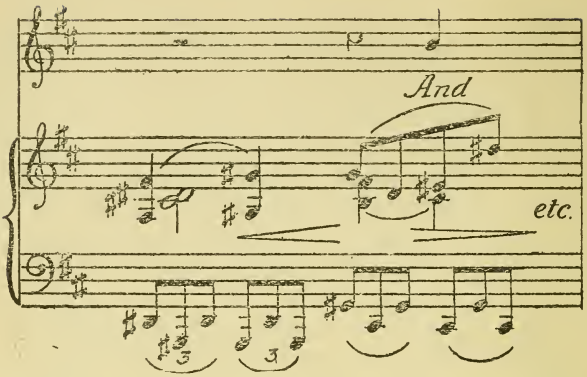
Song ; for the symmetry of structure and continuity of progression, *The Ragamuffin*, without mentioning pieces where the inclusion of popular songs has been purposely adopted.

We have seen however that Musorgsky there took for his point of departure something observed, which he intended chiefly to reproduce characteristically, without having recourse to that part played by emotional expression which constitutes the lyrical style. We have seen that if this method of pure expression by music is not very usual with him, it is because he employs exceptionally the instinctive needs of a realistic temperament. One should remember that realism in art is recognized by the examination of the point of departure and the methods of composition, but not by the results obtained. Without the analysis of the method of composition which illustrates the words, and without the comparison of the author's other pieces, it would be difficult to discover the difference in the respective points of departure with works like Musorgsky's *Ragamuffin* on one hand, and the *Scherzo* of Borodin's Unfinished Symphony on the other ; the effective result is the same in each case, although Musorgsky copied in sounds a rhythmic model, and Borodin invented music.*

*It will be seen how nearly we can pronounce a motival and categorical judgment on artistic realization and the æsthetic value of descriptive music ; it is possible that a musician, in order to invent a *Scherzo*, would have to represent some images, in which case his method would be precisely that of Musorgsky. The results—apart from the eventual inequality of the personal capacities of realization—remain identical, whether he represents images or not. That being so, the difference of the points of departure is purely theoretical and the nature of excitation (rhythmic or emotional suggestion) has no influence on the nature of the music.

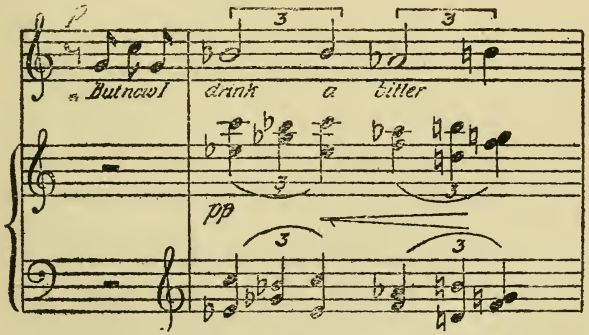
To realize that this distinction has for its sole object the furnishing of the means of analysis, it is sufficient to consider Musorgsky's song *The Magpie*. The purely imaginative words, by Pushkin, have for their object the production of an atmosphere of kaleidoscopic movement, a sparkling badinage. Musorgsky's music, faithful to the spirit of the words, aims chiefly at this artistic effect. It might, on the other hand, be considered as a manifestation of realism, since it is possessed of the double ryhthmic idea which the words offer: the rhythm of precipitated elocution, and the rhythm of suggested movements. In effect, the words flutter about like pure sounds: it is difficult to give any idea of this peculiarity in a translation. Here is, however, a free version of the words: "A very talkative magpie flutters and flaps about near the wall of my garden—he announces the arrival of some visitors. An invisible bell tinkles. A ray of the sun reddens the white snowy carpet. Gay little chimes peal forth—a thousand tambourines resound—everybody, everybody—Ho, liuleshky-liuly! They've come to see the Bohemian, etc."

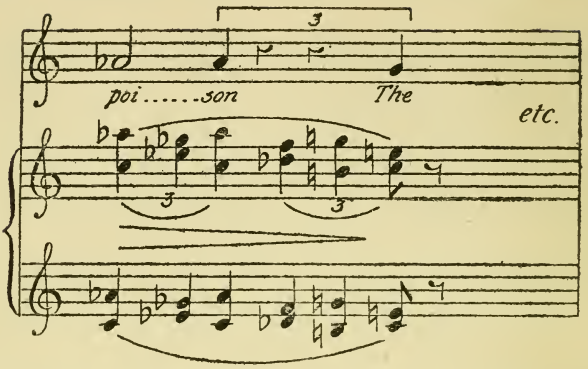
There is much realism in the way in which the music adapts itself to the words; but the text even is so little realistic; it is so manifestly adapted to musical aims, thanks to the efforts of sheer rhythm and of pure play of sounds, that it does not constitute in the least a model of characteristic representation. Evocator in the largest sense of the word, Musorgsky has originated music uniquely evocatory in terms of "pure music." It is the same with *The Ragamuffin*.

Amongst Musorgsky's purely lyrical songs it is important to mention *Night* first ; not that on the whole this song is one of his masterpieces, but because, besides being very welcome, it offers the earliest example in which the composer was inspired to great originality in musical invention. The audacity and the deep beauty of the progression which is developed in the second part of the work will not escape any musician.

The musical style, besides being very free, is devoid of programmatic tendencies, and can only be expressive. Although this may not be Musorgsky's usual ideal, the example is not unique. One can pass over several works of the first period of his life without any loss, and also over the less significant songs on some poems by Alexis Tolstoy, which inspired him at the period when his genius was already declining. But besides the songs in the popular style already quoted, some pieces of free lyricism deserve attention; for example, the wild *Invocation to the Dniépr*, somewhat romantic, but solemn and full of beauty. More intimate in character, and more touching, is the marvellous little piece called *The Hebrew Song* (on some verses from *The Song of Songs*, translated by Mey). This is again one of Musorgsky's best productions from the musical point of view, one of the instances where he follows in the traditions of the artistic style of Glinka, Balakireff, and Borodin. But

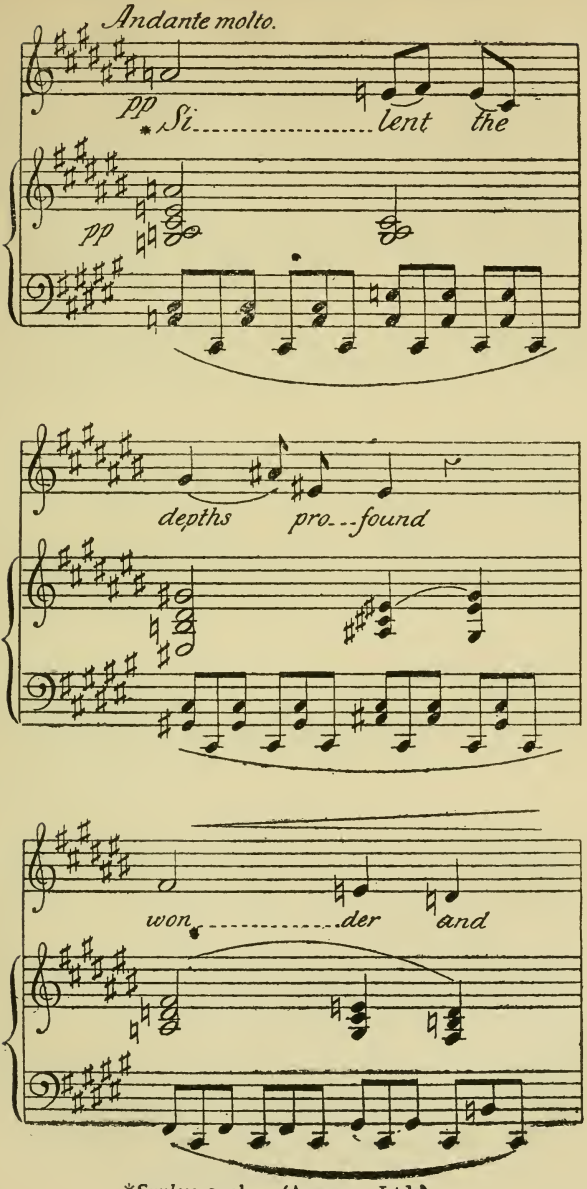
among the non-realistic group, the song-suite *Sunless* is the composer's masterpiece. The six songs which it contains are of varied importance, though all are equally admirable. Sometimes they are purely melodic recitatives, where, according to Musorgsky's custom, the lightest, the most delicate shades of declamation are used. But their outline has something intensely musical which accentuates still more the expressive harmonies of the accompaniment (Nos. 1, 2, 4). In others the song becomes more extended, and forms a part of the melody (No. 3, second part); or even a song of developed phrasing and of symmetrical periods (No. 5, *Elegy*, and especially No. 6, *On the Water*).

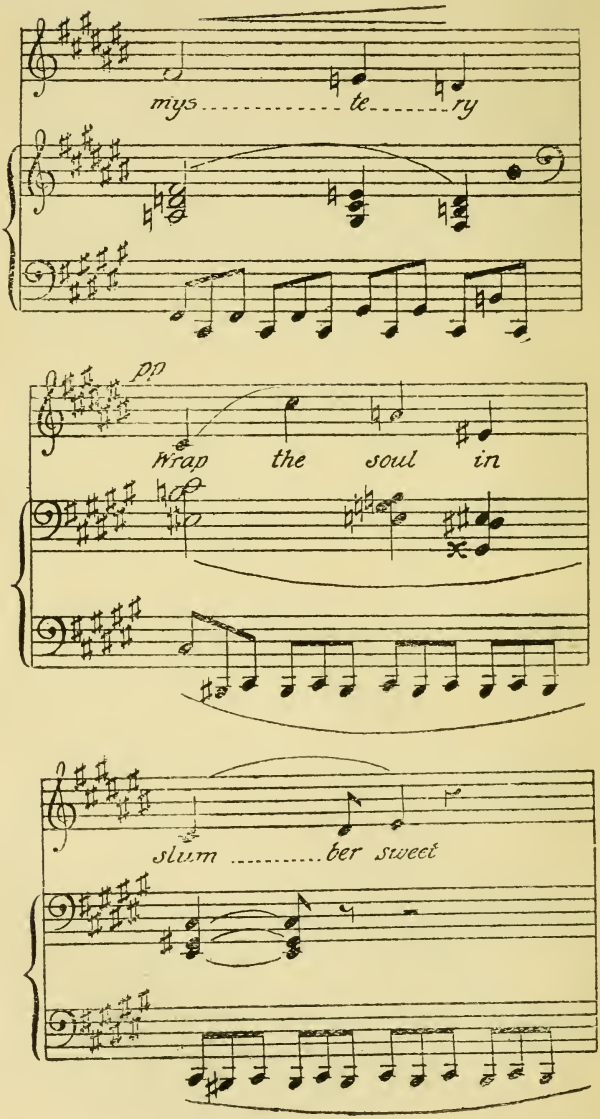
In the three last pieces, the music advances until it alone creates all the atmosphere of the poetry, and lays claim to the chief expression. The most poignant harmonies are used in No. 3, to represent the doleful fluttering of the phantoms of past happiness.



*Sunless cycle. English Words by A. E. Hull (Augener Ltd.).

Here by its expressive character as well as by the rhythmic flow, the accompaniment has a specifically representative feature. One will notice that the arrangement of the harmony suggests a binary accentuation in opposition to the triplet notation.

The thousand fluctuating sensations, confused and restless, which the words of the enigmatic *Elegy* express so well, are represented in a similar manner, all carefully proportioned. The whole song is one of the strangest productions, the richest in mysterious charm, that art has to offer. It would be necessary to refer to the wonderful reveries of Edgar Alan Poe to find a term of comparison which expresses the sound (the *Stimmung*, a German would say more precisely) of this piece.

The last number, *On the Water*, is still more lyrical in expression, in the amplitude of the vocal part, in the regularity of the disposition, and in the quality of the accompaniment. Its beauty is such that this piece alone would suffice to give immortality to the musician who wrote it.

*Sunless cycle. (Augener Ltd.).


mys te ry
pp
wrap the soul in
slum ber sweet

Less grand, but no less perfect, taking it as a whole, is the idyl *On the Banks of the Don*, written on a charming poem by Koltsoff: "Near the Don a garden blossomed. . . . There I have seen, on a beautiful evening, Masha pass by; and never shall I forget how she sighed; how, with a loving smile, she murmured faint, faint words. . . . Forgetfully she allowed the water to run away from her pitcher. . . . Near the Don a garden blossomed." It is impossible to define everything that the music adds to the poesy of these words (the Russian words are taken for granted); there is a certain original, penetrating, smooth feeling, and the delicate rhythmic evocations, although of a mimetic precision, gently rise and fall, giving a feeling of perfect restfulness.

The *Songs and Dances of Death* again reveal Musorgsky's genius in a very striking way. Important even on the score of size, they are still more so on account of the richness of their contents, both in view of the musical quality and of the poetic evocation.

It would be unjust not to recognise that the poet's genius has contributed much to their general excellence. One knows that they suited Musorgsky's peculiarities, because he has followed their suggestions so precisely. One can also render the same tribute to Ostrovsky for the *Peasant's Cradle-Song*, to Pushkin for *The Magpie*, and to Musorgsky himself for *In the Nursery* and for *The Ragamuffin*. However, this present case must remain apart,

for the value of the Golenistcheff-Kutusoff poems, or at least of the first three, is far above the ordinary; and further, it seems that here the musician had merely to realize their contents in music, without adding anything; which in its way was but a mediocre task.

If we compare the *Songs and Dances of Death* with the *Sunless* song-cycle, (the words of which are by the same poet) we feel strongly that the musical invention in the *Elegy* or *On the Water* is greater; that the musical beauty is in a correlation less absolute than that of the text. It is a different case, one where it would be unreasonable to draw a conclusion as to the respective value of these two works.

Here are the words of *The Trépak** :—

Deep—in the forest
Where breathes not a sound
Only sad winds, mournfully weeping,
And it seems as if in the darkness around
Evil, its way swift pursuing,
See—it is there! . . .
In the darkness
Goes a peasant:
Death draweth nigh; and, caressing,
Dancing the Trépak entrancing together;
Now in his ear softly chanting:
Hi! peasant man,
Poor old man so weary!
Thou hast drunk much,
And thy step is dreary.
Loud the tempest rages,

[**Trépak*, a national dance.]

And the blizzard blinding,
Deeper in the forest,
Ne'er thy pathway finding,
Thou, sad, and suffering grief and care,
Lay down and sleep!
Sweetly sleep, my dear.
I to thee, beloved mine,
Fair dreams discover;
And with soft white snow
Thy frozen limbs I cover.
Hi! to my aid, snow and storm and thunder,
Sing then, O wind, songs of night and wonder.
Whisper a tale of glory
And of joys unfailing;
Tell without cease the story
Till the night is paling.
Hi! forest deep, hear the voice of my calling,
Clouds rolling by in the darkness appalling;
Snow and sleet together
Wreathe a sheet of feather.
Round him sad with weeping,
As a child—*he's sleeping.*

. . . . . .

Sleep, friend, close thine eyes,
Lay thee sweetly dreaming;
Summer is here once again.
O'er fields, the sun-rays
Warmly gleaming;
In the hay
Sweet voices;
Hear their happy singing,
Echoing far—away ——

*From Mme. Marie Rosing's translation (Augener Ltd.).

We see that the poem is of supreme beauty. The end especially is a superhuman stroke. A musician could only either outrage such a poem, or else make a masterpiece of it; Musorgsky has done the latter.

The methods of composition have already been analysed in this book with too much insistence for it to serve any useful purpose to describe them again. It is necessary however to say, in a general way, that the *Trépak* is the most freely descriptive piece that Musorgsky ever wrote. Descriptive, the slow rising of the principal theme of the work (that of the dance from which it takes its name) at first with no rhythm but a tremolo, up to the moment when it breaks into the characteristic duple beat. Descriptive, from the whistling and howling tempest which accompanies this rhythm; from the tender song which relates the splendid dream as the peasant dies, to the pulsations of the principal *Trépak* theme, which comes breaking into the peaceful song, like an echo from earth.

But here the description no longer proceeds as formerly by simple rhythmic translations. It is of a superior kind and similar to that which appears in fine autonomous and descriptive music; it is based chiefly on the equivalence of emotion expressed by the music and that which the subject itself claims—it is what Beethoven defined as: *Mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei.** An

*More an expression of feeling than a tone-painting.

examination of the beginning and the whole of the final part, proves this. Without the constant suggestive aids which the words offer, Musorgsky would not have been capable of reaching this high level.

The Cradle-Song *Death and the Mother* offers nothing nearly so imaginative. A mother watches by her sick child. At the dawn, Death comes knocking at the door: "Be not afraid, mother. The breaking dawn has silvered your window. Sadly grieving, too long you have watched. Rest now; I will lull your son to sleep better than you." And Death sings his calm, icy slumber song. In vain, the mother implores him to cease; Death stops her with a gesture: "There now, see, my gentle song has sent him to sleep. Bye-bye!" The simplest musical means deepen and amplify the tragic dialogue, so minutely declaimed, continuing without a moment's pause for musical development; the contrasts are all the more striking in consequence. The harmonies which accompany the utterances of Death are remarkable for their expressive conciseness.

Death the Serenader is, from a musical point of view, much more fully realized, being more lyrical in tone. In this song, Death appears under the window, where a fair but ailing maiden leans out, dreaming. Death is romantically garbed as a young knight-errant. His song recalls the beauty of life and happiness: "Listen to my serenade. Beautiful art thou, and I love thee." The phantom embraces the girl . . . . *and stifles her.*

Nothing here justifies realistic methods of expression, except the last verse: Listen to my loving words. . . . Be silent . . . . Thou art mine!" And there Musorgsky has not failed in accuracy of expression; the music finishes by a simple recitative under which the rhythm of the serenade beats in a faint *pianissimo*, roughly interrupted by the last shrill cry of triumph.

One can see similar qualities of dramatic force in *Field-Marshal Death*; nevertheless this piece is more superficial in certain respects*; emotion is produced perhaps almost to an equal degree, but sometimes one must freely admit, in a more mechanical way. However, the work remains on the whole very beautiful, although it cannot be compared with the three preceding. It begins by a vivid and impressive representation of a battle; then, when the survivors have fled, when shadows hover over the battlefield, Death appears, disguised as a field-marshal on horseback. He crosses the plain covered with corpses, to which he addresses some wild and jeering words.

By the side of this dramatic piece should be placed *Left Behind*, a song more solemnly carried out, where the emotion is less dramatic, and where the music accentuates by quite classic means the striking picture of a corpse lying in the hollow of a trench, whilst in a village far away the mother croons to her baby of the happy times coming when

*One must not forget that Musorgsky wrote it two years later in 1877, at the time when his creative genius was already failing.

daddy returns. Golenistcheff-Kutusoff has also treated this theme, so simple itself, in a straightforward and concentrated manner. *Left Behind* is called a *Ballad*, and the title well indicates its its lyric and somewhat idealized character.

Some choral pieces, published separately by Musorgsky, are of unequal value. For the most part they are taken from discarded dramatic works, such as *Œdipus* and *Salammbo*—the latter infinitely nobler and more original in inspiration. The long scene *The Defeat of Sennacherib*, is very well realized without being noteworthy for any special qualities. On the other hand, *Joshua Navin* is admirable music, strong, expressive, elaborate, and strongly marked with orientalism, a feature which is very rarely found in Musorgsky's music.*

There again, the composer has utilized material from *Salammbo*. Four transcriptions of national songs (short choruses for male-voice choir), show Musorgsky in the unusual aspect of an active folklore collector. They are charming little pieces, skilfully scored.

*The reason for this fact was given in the Chapter on the *Instrumental Compositions*. Amongst the exceptional cases where Musorgsky makes use of Asiatic musical atmosphere, *Joshua* and *The Hebrew Song* are the most important. However, according to Stassoff, Musorgsky was always ambitious to rival the oriental music of Balakireff and Rimsky-Korsakoff.

CHAPTER VI

THE OPERAS

Early Works

The story of Musorgsky's life has shown how the artist, in obedience to the impulse of the peculiar temperament which we have recognized, was drawn towards dramatic composition. Whilst but a youth, he has made a rough sketch of *Han d'Islande*: a veritable schoolboy's idea, and one which scarcely pointed to his future ideal of pure and simple truth. For this opera he was ambitious enough to write the words as well as the music. More significant is the fact that four years later he undertook to write the music of *Œdipus*. And this time, he did not adhere to a simple plan: "He composed," Stassoff says, "several numbers of this work which could not be found amongst his papers after his death, but of which I and all of his friends have seen the score, and have heard him play on the piano more than once." However, a chorus has been saved, the one which the people sing when assembled in front of the Temple of Eumenides before the apparition of *Œdipus*. It is a very agreeable piece, not without strength, but it offers nothing original, nor even a promise of originality.

Three years later, Musorgsky decided to compose an opera on Flaubert's *Salammbo*, and he wrote the libretto himself. Here are Stassoff's interesting details of this work, of which some parts have been preserved and published :*

" Before the end of 1863, the second scene of the second act was finished. At the end of 1864, Musorgsky had completed two more important parts of this opera : the first scene of the third act, and the first scene of the fourth. According to the libretto, all the scenes, crowded with dramatic movement in the style of Meyerbeer, call for great masses of people at moments of popular ebullition ; the scenes for the principal characters were of less importance. The second scene of the second act shows *Salammbo* at night, in the Temple of Tanis, and the abduction of Zaimph by Matho. The first scene of the third act, which is connected to the preceding one, was the Sacrifice to Moloch and the Invocation of the god. In the fourth act we see Matho captive, dreaming of *Salammbo* ; a procession of priests comes to read her condemnation. For this scene, Musorgsky interpolated some verses from Poleïaeff, and some others from Heine.

" It is noticeable that in this work, Musorgsky has placed great importance on the directions for the scene-setting. He has borrowed the minute description of the costumes from Flaubert's novel, and has noted all the decorative

*Translated with some abbreviations.

details, the movements and attitudes of the people, even the play of light. All these indications are important and characteristic. They show how Musorgsky, differing from the majority of composers, was very fastidious about the scenic representation of all the plastic and picturesque elements of the opera.

"After having finished this part of the fourth act, Musorgsky definitely put *Salammbo* on one side. But later on, at long intervals, he took the best numbers from the work, and used them for other compositions. Thus, *Salammbo's Invocation to Tanis* became the recitative of the dying *Boris Godunoff*; the chorus of Tanis' priestesses and Matho's recitative as he stands hidden behind a column of the temple, were utilized for the love passages of Dimitry and Marina (*Boris Godunoff*), the instrumental figure characterising Matho (which was used again in a magnificent chorus of Lybians, since lost) re-appeared in the chorus *Joshua Navin*. The pathetic scene which follows Zaimph's abduction furnished the elements for the passage in the last scene of *Boris Godunoff*, where the people take possession of the two Jesuits. A Carthaginian chorus (in F sharp minor), formerly written for *Œdipus*, was first re-used for *Mlada*, and later on, after the failure of Guedeonoff's scheme, for the opera *The Fair of Sorotchinsk*. The opening of the scene in the Temple of Moloch was used for *Boris Godunoff's* short song (Act III.) and the Triumphal Hymn to

Moloch, for the *Slavsia* (Chorus of Glory) to the Usurper Dimitry in *Boris Godunoff*. The last scene of Act III. furnished the material for the *Night on the Bare Mountain*, and also became part of *The Fair of Sorotchinsk;* and Matho's condemnation became the scene in *Boris Godunoff*, where the Duma is assembled to decree the death of the usurper Dimitry.

"Thus all the music written for *Salammbo* has been used elsewhere, except part of the recitatives.* It must not be thought that Musorgsky was content with merely mechanical reproductions; on the contrary, he worked very hard at these materials to fit them to the demands of the new subjects; and he did this also because his artistic temperament had ripened. More often than not, these materials have gained under their new setting. Only once was Musorgsky less well-inspired: in the *arioso* of Act III. of *Boris Godunoff*. The theme employed was more appropriate to its original destination (a choral prayer) than to the recitative of the repentant *Boris*."

Such transference of material is by no means unique. Even the great masters, Bach and Gluck, for example, have thus occasionally transferred a musical fragment from one work to another, with more or less modification. It is an interesting fact, for it proves at once that the music written for

*It is evident that the recitatives, the least formalized part in the musical drama, could hardly be taken over from one work to another.

Salammbo had a certain intrinsic value ; the other fragments preserved confirm this ; and on the other hand, Musorgsky began in 1864 to produce some very intimate works : *Kallistrate* and *Night*. But it chiefly confirms the thesis enunciated in the preceding chapter, that music, even the most realistic in tendency, must necessarily generalize. It must stylize to a certain extent, so that it may be susceptible of adapting itself occasionally to such transferences. Other features noted by Stassoff : the assignment of the principal part to the people, the intelligent are for scenic acccuracy—already foretell the dramatist of *Khovanshchina* and of *Boris Godunoff*.

Of the three known fragments, the chorus of the priestesses, who console Salammbo and invest her with festival garments, has an impressive charm ; it is expressive, though very chaste in outline. One notices there the beautiful effect so simply obtained by a continuous rhythmic pedal. The song of Balearus has both colour and strength. The Scene of Salammbo in the Temple of Tanis is rather ordinary in parts, but contains some great beauties, notably in the last part, which Musorgsky re-used almost word for word in the scene of the dying Boris.

The Marriage-Broker

After his work on *Salammbo*, an epic in grandiose style, where he had endeavoured to reproduce vast historical pictures, Musorgsky undertook one of quite a different character : a well-known, realistic

musical comedy, developed in modern style. The words for it were provided, not by a libretto written to order, but by a work for the stage by Gogol, *The Marriage-Broker*, which the composer decided to set to music without the least alteration in its form.

The choice alone is significant. Musorgsky continues to advance towards the discovery of the the pure, simple, and dramatic truth, that he dreamed of for his music. Gogol's comedy, which had impressed him quite as much by the directness of its observation as by the freedom of its humour, provided him with situations, characters and a dialogue which gave him, besides the characteristic atmosphere of the people's life, an atmosphere pre-eminently suited to the composer's nature; an atmosphere which he had already evoked in several songs (*Kallistrate*, *The Peasant's Cradle Song*, and *To the Mushrooms*.)

It was in 1868 that Musorgsky, yielding partly to the exhortations of Dargomisky and of Cæsar Cui, began to work on the new opera. At this time all the composers of the school were working ardently with one supreme object—to create a Russian musical drama.* Balakireff wrote *The*

*This is at least proven, in their common name, by Cæsar Cui in his pamphlet *Music in Russia* (page 70, seq). These pages are worth reading, for they are significant. We see there that these Russian musicians, whilst agreeing for the greater part with Wagner's ideas on musical drama, and disagreeing with conventional opera, were the first to agitate against the intrusion of the symphonic development into dramatic music. And we notice there chiefly the statement of the new truth that "vocal music ought to be in perfect concord with the meaning of the words." Musorgsky made these principles, which his comrades only applied with some elasticity his very own.

Golden Bird, and Borodin, *The Tsar's Bride.** Cæsar Cui had nearly finished *William Ratcliff* The score of Dargomisky's *The Statue Guest* was already well advanced. In every respect the circumstances were favourable to the inclination which Musorgsky felt towards dramatic music.

Certainly Dargomisky's influence and example helped greatly in the decision which he made to set these words of Gogol's to music. But what made the attempt particularly daring is that the words were in prose.† For the first time also, the national life, "the trivial round the common task," acquired without any glossing over, the right of reproduction in the lyric theatre.

For some time Musorgsky worked enthusiastically at the composition of this work. Several passages from the letters which he then wrote to Cæsar Cui, show with what lucidity he had undertaken the task of writing music for the stage. "Altogether," he writes, "the first act, in my opinion, can be called an attempt at *opera dialogue.*‡ Whenever it is possible, I make myself note clearly the changes of intonation, which come to people in the course of the dialogue, and there, it seems to me, in the smallest details, even with the most insignificant words†;

*These operas were abandoned by their authors. Later on, Rimsky-Korsakoff took up the subject of *The Tsar's Bride*.

†It was not absolutely the first attempt however. Compare Steibelt's *Romeo and Juliet* (the 1793 revision) with its dialogues in prose. It is needless to add that the spirit of this work, which was forgotten even before Musorgsky's birth, has nothing modern about it; the presence of the prose there is absolutely accidental and signifies nothing.

‡In French in the text.

the secret of Gogol's biting humour is hidden." (July 3rd, 1868.)

"A favourable frame of mind. What an important thing for an artist! And—you will congratulate me on my return—I have reached it. I am resting after the completion of the first act; I am now reflecting and composing the second act, but I have not yet begun to write it down. I feel that I must wait in order that the character of the marriage-broker's scene at the beginning of the act, between Jevakin and Vaitchnitsa, may be represented, as well as I have been able to portray Thecla and Kotchkaroff.

"It has been truly said: 'The further one plunges into the forest, the more trees one finds.' And how subtle is Gogol in this fanciful story! He has closely watched the old women, the peasants, and has discovered amongst them some bewitching types. . . . All that will be useful to me; and the old women's types are a pure treasure!" (August 15th, 1868.)

From the moment when Musorgsky thought of setting Pushkin's *Boris Godunoff* to music, he gave up all other plans, notwithstanding the fact that *The Marriage Broker* was a work quite after his own heart, one in the composition of which he could give free play to his inventive instincts. He felt this so deeply that in 1873 he writes to Stassoff, to whom he sent the autograph MS. of the piece:*

*On the first page of the MS. appears the sub-title: "Attempt at Dramatic Music in Prose" as well as the inscription "Begun on Tuesday, June 1st, 1868 at St. Petersburgh; finished Tuesday July 8th, in the village of Chilivo, government of Tula." At the end of the second scene is found the date, "July 2nd, 1868, Chilivo."

"I think of you entirely on this day which is so dear to me . . . . and I ask myself: 'How can I please the friend whom I so love?' With my impetuous character, I found the reply at once: to offer myself as a gift. This I do! Accept my recent work on Gogol's *The Marriage-Broker*; examine this attempt at musical discourse; compare it with *Boris*, taking into consideration the years 1868 and 1871; you will see that what I give you here is undeniably myself. I add to it Kotchkareff's rôle, copied by Dargomisky. It is a precious witness of what Dargomisky did during the last part of his life; very ill, very busy with his *Statue-Guest*, he yet found the time to make this copy. It was a great day for me. I believe for an amateur, my *Marriage-Broker* is rich in revelations of my musical audacities. You know how precious my *Marriage-Broker* is to me. And to tell the truth, know then that it was suggested by Dargomisky (jokingly); also by Cui (seriously). I have indicated the period and the duration of the work; even the place is mentioned. All is in order; nothing is lacking."

Other letters from Musorgsky, written at the period when he worked on *The Marriage-Broker*, are no less enlightening as to the composer's tendencies in this work, and the satisfaction that he felt in seeing this "Attempt at Opera in Dialogue," realized exactly according to his views. He writes to Cæsar Cui, on July 3rd, 1868:

" Scarcely had I left St. Petersburgh than I finished the first scene of my *Marriage-Broker*. . . . I have considerably simplified what I have shown you of it. I have found for Podkolessin (the hero of the piece) a very successful orchestral phrase, which could not be bettered for the scene of the ' Asking in Marriage.' Dargomisky, I believe, is enchanted with it. It enters for the first time in the conversation with Stefan (Podkolessin's valet) under the words : ' Has he not asked ? ' It is, you see, a *fragment** of rough fun. It will be heard again in complete form, at the time of the ' Official Demand ' in Act III., when Podkolessin has already decided to marry.† It characterizes Podkolessin's stupid embarassment very well, I believe. In the first scene, I have arranged a clever exit for Stefan. When Podkolessin calls him for the third time, he becomes furious, but naturally, he curbs himself ; and when Podkolessin says to him : ' Brother, I wish to demand of thee . . . . ' he cries *fortissimo*, ' The old woman has arrived ! ' Thus cutting short his master's opportunity. The second scene is actually sketched in outline : ' Here is the deceitful dog ' and the ' grey hairs ' are very well arranged. I believe that this little scene is not bad and will prove interesting. At the end, Podkolessin's bear-like shrugging to the words ' the grey hairs ' ! are realized in a curious way. . . .

*In French in the text.

†This clearly shows a fact which the examination of *Boris Godunoff* will confirm : that Musorgsky perceived very precisely the advantage of the leading themes.

I have made myself give the full value to all the shades of intonation which the actors make in the course of the dialogue, and this even on the smallest words and for the tiniest reasons. Thus, in the scene with Stefan, this person passes suddenly from an obsequious tone to an angry manner, after his master has spoken crossly to him. In the scene with Thecla, there are also a few such moments."

One sees what Musorgsky wished to effect: a minutely noted dialogue of scrupulous fidelity, which the accompaniment should set off by suggesting, or even by imposing on it the most appropriate music. And never has the author of *Boris Godunoff* and *In the Nursery* been more profoundly himself, more faithful to his ideal, than in the four scenes of this comedy. Never has he been more daring; never has he found more novel and more striking means of expression. *The Marriage-Broker* remains unique in Musorgsky's work, not only by its constant animation, very different from that of the comic songs or the homely scenes of *Boris Godunoff* (In the Inn) and of *Khovanshchina* (beginning of Act I), but by its atmosphere and its musical style. Only four personages figure in it: the foolish old Podkolessin, who wishes to marry; his valet, Stefan, tired out by his patron's incessant absurdities; Thecla, the courted in marriage, loquacious, restless, simpering, and stiffly decorous; and Kotchkareff, the friend at Court, who knows everything, and is never sparing in offering advice on all occasions.

Musorgsky has done wonders in transforming the words of these four people into lyrical declamation; the tone of the conversation is musical at the same time as it is highly characteristic, and it is couched in the simplest manner in which he alone could use.

Gogol's comic dialogue in itself possesses great humour, which he is always careful not to carry to the point of grossness. Musorgsky had then an entirely new style to create and he he accomplished it.

What gives supreme merit to the score of *The Marriage-Broker* is the happy vein of this music which settles and depicts in decisive features all the essentials of the words, the atmosphere, the picturesque colouring, and its incomparable ripple and flow. The music of *The Marriage-Broker* is the triumph of rhythm, a plastic and varied rhythm of never flagging elasticity. We have seen that in the first scenes of *In the Nursery*, Musorgsky carries one of his favourite methods to its very extreme (compare the *Promenade* in the *Pictures from an Exhibition*) by changing the time-signature almost at every bar. One is astonished to find nothing of this sort in *The Marriage-Broker*. In the whole of the first act, it is rare that the bars of 2–4 and 3–4 are alternated for a brief space with the 4–4 time which predominates. I believe too that one will not find there a single syncopation. It is within the bar that the rhythm changes so freely, breaking up with a superb independence, and this in a most unexpected, though perfectly

natural manner. And in the voice-part triplets and duplets continually alternate.

The character of the melody in *The Marriage-Broker* is revealed as soon as we think of its rhythmic peculiarities; as in nearly the whole work of Musorgsky, everything that is not a notation of the spoken language is mimetic notation. There is no doubting that the scenes in *The Marriage-Broker* will provide material for a thousand different musical figures of this nature, which appear, disappear, or perhaps return, with the greatest logic from the scenic point of view, if not from the musical point of view. Some quick triplets and a motive which seems of a folk-tune nature dance around Thecla to reproduce her quick and obsequious gestures, her Sabbatarian bearing. Although the dialogue does not stop for an instant, the play of the facial muscles between the answers is suggested in the music, just as if it were a series of rapid pencil sketches. The little musical figure to Podkolessin (page 5, line 1) takes occasionally a quick and graceful garb, without losing its essential, characteristic rhythm (pages 8, line 3; 10, line 21; 4, line 3; etc.) or it undergoes a melodic modification to accentuate Podkolessin's contrite look towards his broken mirror (page 38, line 1).

Often the action is suggested by even the inflections in the voice-part; witness certain malformed progressions (in the style of Richard Strauss) a feature of which no other work of Musorgsky, I truly believe, offers an example.* The tonal

*Page 14, line 3.

feeling of the whole work is very free, and all kinds of transformations abound, a process which assures a complete liberty to the melody without its appearing far-fetched or strained—if we judge by the ears and not by the eyes.

The same features are found in the harmonization, which is very light and still more daring. As a particular case of this, we will mention the clashing seconds quite in the modern style, which are rather effects of timbre (tone-colour) than real harmonic effects. It is very interesting to meet with these in a work of 1868.*

It is as impossible to characterize the accuracy of the declamation by epithets, as it is to enumerate their peculiarities. The comic character of the intonations is reproduced sometimes by abnormal intervals, and sometimes by sudden leaps. We notice the absence of sustained notes, and even those of long value, a practice quite in keeping with Musorgsky's desire to rest on the note in the most natural manner possible; the division into triplets introduced appropriately during the whole of that part of the vocal recitative which constitutes this declamation; and the absence of all such accompanimental formulas as are somewhat conventional, trite and ordinary.

Altogether, *The Marriage-Broker* is a profoundly revealing and original work. We find there Musorgsky himself, the complete Musorgsky.

The two unfinished scores which we must men-

*Pages 28, lines 2 & 3; 33; 36; etc.

tion are each characterized by a very special quality: *Salammbo*, by the part taken by the great historical frescoes, where an important part is given to the populace, to the crowd, conceived no longer as a simple filling-in of the stage-scene, but as one of the characters of the drama; *The Marriage-Broker*, by its simplicily as well as by the expressive force of the musical declamation. These two qualities, carried to their highest point, form the strength of the masterpiece which he began to write in 1868—*Boris Godunoff*.

Boris Godunoff.

If ever a drama deserves the qualification of *national*, it is easily Pushkin's *Boris Godunoff*, where we find decisive events in Russian history related, and where royal personages and their satellites appear in various and characteristic intrigues, strongly contrasted with the real people, faithfully observed and depicted with masterly art. All the qualities of this serious and tragic work are found again, carried to a high degree, in the new form which Musorgsky adopted for his purpose. Never had anything been conceived in such a manner in the history of opera or of the drama itself. With the exception of one or two weak passages, which disappear in the flowing surge of events, all is true, strong, and simple. The art of the manufacturer of numbers has nothing in common with this, nor has the intellect which can cunningly combine resources, balance proportions,

and manipulate partwriting, any place in it. Real life, presented without additions or commentary—that is what is offered to us in Musorgsky's *Boris Godunoff*.

The story, which is there set out and developed, is troubled and gloomy. Let us first take the historical facts which the work portrays :—

Boris Godunoff was the acting ruler of the Russian Empire during the reign of the Tsar Féodor, son of Ivan the Terrible. Another son of Ivan, Dimitry, exiled to Uglitch, was found foully murdered towards the end of the reign of Féodor. Public opinion attributed the crime to Boris, who on Dimitry's death became Tsar. After a short, unhappy reign, Boris died, at the time when the people revolted, and placed on the throne an usurper who was made to pass for the Tsarvitch Dimitry, miraculously brought back to life.

It has been proved that Boris did not kill Dimitry. The historian Karamsin, however, adopted the opinion popularly held ; and both Pushkin and Musorgsky make Boris's crime one of the chief elements of interest in the dramatic version.

"*Boris Godunoff, Opera in four acts with a prologue. Complete edition for piano and voice, containing scenes not intended for stage performance*" : such is the exact title of the original edition of Musorgsky's masterpiece, published towards the end of 1875 or at the beginning of 1876.*

Was the restriction, which this title contained,

*The censor's signature is dated the 18/30 of November, 1875.

inserted to satisfy one knows not what objections of certain scrupulous people? Or does it contain the parts which it was customary to omit by order of the theatre direction? Or does it truly represent Musorgsky's intentions? It is difficult to decide the question. In its complete form, *Boris Godunoff* is of gigantic proportions. The publication of a drama *The Dynasts* "intended solely for mental representation" has recently given a great English writer, Thomas Hardy, the opportunity to suggest (in his preface) that "purely mental representations will perhaps one day be reserved for all drama based on anything other than contemporaneous or frivolous life." It is not impossible that Musorgsky as a realist, confident of the appropriateness of his music to such direct evocations, and conscious also of the inherent imperfections of stage performances, agreed by implication with some such theory. He has not moreover indicated what parts should be suppressed in the stage performance, and has given indications throughout relating to the staging.*

Pushkin's drama of which Musorgsky has made use, was not especially written for stage-representation—the translators, Ivan Turgeneff and Louis Viardot, especially noticed this in their Preface to the French Edition. It is very difficult to trace Pushkin's words in those adopted by Musorgsky. The latter's are naturally much simplified. The libretto is partly formed of borrowings from Push-

*It must be noticed that these indications are briefest in the Third Act, and they did not form part of the first version.

kin, and partly written by Musorgsky himself. In both prose and verse alternate according to the needs of the expression—an excellent method, of which English Elizabethan dramatists have supplied some fine examples.* and which suits the musical drama in every way, with its alternations of lyricism and simple dramatic truth which the higher art forms allow.†

Both Pushkin's drama and Musorgsky's libretto have too this in common: they are deprived of all so-called construction, and are, on the whole, rather illustrations in the history of *Boris*, than a really continuous dramatic action. Perhaps even more than Pushkin's work, Musorgsky's *Boris*, formed as it is of a small number of essential scenes without apparent connection, is a simple succession of pictures, the connections of which

*Pushkin's *Boris Godunoff* was written on the model of Shakespeare's plays.

†With regard to this question, one will remember a lucid thesis by Edgar Alan Poe on the respective fields of prose and poetry: "While the rhythm is an essential aid in the development of the poem's highest idea—the idea of the beautiful—the artificialities of this rhythm are an inseparable bar to the development of all points of thought or of expression which have their basis in truth. The writer of the prose tale may bring to his theme a vast variety of modes or inflections of thought and expression which are not only antagonistic to the nature of the poem, but absolutely forbidden by one of its most peculiar and indispensable adjuncts, rhythm" (*Essay on Hawthorne*). This quotation is all the more interesting because it contains, in germ, the whole theory of the minimum of stylization, the basis and distinctive character of realistic art. What Poe says of poetic rhythm remains true of the broad flow of musical rhythm in general.

only the spectator who is familiar with the historical story will understand.*

Stage-convention plays no rôle here. Musorgsky aimed at solidifying the most striking moments of the great national drama, and of the interior dramas which he saw in Pushkin's work, into one artistic setting; and he did the same with the stories, three-quarters historical, one-quarter legendary, which furnished the material for it. Karamsin's *History of the Russian Empire*, and several popular chronicles constituted with Pushkin's work, the materials used by Musorgsky.

Like Pushkin, Musorgsky has not concentrated the interest on the pathetic story of the Tsar Boris.† The chief character in this work is the populace, the mass which groans, surges and agitates almost from beginning to end. The drama commences with the crowd anxiously massed before the monastery where Boris lies hidden. It ends with the extreme excitement of the revolting masses, of which one feels a presentiment all through the first three acts; there is a continouus and inevitable onward movement.

This principal character, like even the single personages, seems chiefly passive (the Usurper

*It is only right to add that the music considerably augments the coherence of the work, as much by the relative atmospheric unity which it creates, as by the presence of principal themes very suitably employed, as also by some secondary leading musical themes. (See pages 169 *seq.*)

†And even Boris from this historical point of view plays there an inaccurate rôle. Far from being a tyrant, Boris, after endeavouring to pacify Russia, made great efforts to advance the prosperity of the Empire.

nearly always remains in the back-ground, and only appears at the climax). Fate alone is acting, and is the chief spur of the action, which thereby acquires an almost Æschylian grandeur.

A very condensed exposition comprises the two scenes of the prologue. The first scene represents the Courtyard of the Novodievitch monastery. A dense swaying crowd, goaded by the brutal commands of a police-officer is heard, making earnest supplication :

" Why dost thou abandon thy people, O our Father ? "

" Why leave us as orphans ? "

" Why do we cry ? " asks one voice.

" I know nothing about it."

" We want a Tsar for Russia," declares a third.

On the repeated injunctions of the officer, the crowd, exhausted for a moment, begins supplicating again with renewed ardour, until the moment when the Chief Secretary of the Duma appears and announces that Boris, a refugee in the convent, refuses to accept the throne :* " But God may still inspire his soul ! " The choir-leaders and pilgrims intone a hymn †

*In Pushkin's drama, the opening scene explains that Boris refused for ulterior reasons.

†As a proof of the intelligence with which Musorgsky understood and foresaw the exigencies of theatrical staging, Stassoff quotes the indication for setting the scene from the autograph libretto of *Boris Godunoff*. . . . . " The people are assembled in little groups in the Courtyard of the monastery. Slow and indolent movements. Some nobles cross the scene ; they salute and approach the gateway of the tower. When they have entered, the people crowd round ; some of them try to see what is happening inside ; others talk in a low voice, etc"

The words of this first scene are entirely Musorgsky's and have hardly any feature in common with the corresponding scene of Pushkin's drama. It is the same with the second scene where, in the Kremlin at Moscow, on the Day of the Coronation, the new Tsar, care-worn and pre-occupied, passes through the midst of his people who acclaim him.

In Act I, the curtain reveals the interior of a monk's cell. Night has nearly gone, a lamp burns faintly. The old monk Pimen is busily engaged in writing out the chronicles of his times, a glorious history, but full also of tales of bloodshed and of mourning. A novice, Gregory Otrepieff, sits near him sleeping. Soon a terrible dream disturbs the young man, and Pimen speaks some comforting words to him. Later on, Gregory awakes, and questions the old man about the Tsarvitch Dimitry, who was assassinated by order of the reigning Tsar. When Pimen leaves the cell to go to morning Mass, Gregory becomes excited at the thought of Boris's crime and the coming judgment of God and man. This scene which is very fine, is taken with some modification, from Pushkin.

The second scene represents an inn near the Lithuanian frontier. The hostess, a lively gossip, sings the folk-song of the Drake. Two bibulous monks, Missail and Varlaam arrive. With them is the disguised Gregory. He has fled from the convent and is trying to gain the frontier. But the alarm has been given. The police watch the roads. Some officers come to search the inn, and interrogate the three travellers. Gregory, in spite

of a clever ruse, is finally recognized, but brandishing a sword, he succeeds in escaping. The words, both touching and humorous, are chiefly by Pushkin. Musorgsky has written merely the earlier part of the scene, the words of which he has borrowed from folk-song.

The Second Act takes place in the Tsar's private apartments at the Kremlin. Xenia, Boris's daughter, kneeling in front of his portrait, laments her lost love, Dimitry. Near her, her young brother the Tsarvitch Féodor, is playing with a mechanical chiming clock. The nurse speaks some consoling words, and proposes a clapping game. In the midst of this homely group, the Tsar enters unexpectedly. The nurse utters a cry of terror. Boris understands it, and speaks some comforting words, first to Xenia, then to his son. Proud of his knowledge, Féodor describes to his father the story of the Russian Empire: "Good, my son," said the Tsar. "Work, Féodor, one day this Empire will be yours." And at this thought of his supreme power, Boris grows sad and remembers the crime with which he bought it, and the growing unrest amongst his people. Dismissing his son, he becomes terrified, demented. A strange noise interrupts the scene; in the corridors, the nurses and servants are trying to catch an escaped parroquet.* The Tsarvitch is sent to enquire, and

*This episode is founded on the fact (related by Karamsin) that the first parroquet introduced to Russia was given to Tsar Boris. Childish as it seems at first sight it is really an admirable idea, which denotes exceptional feeling both for theatrical truth and for effect. Further on in the opera, the mechanical clock starts chiming, at the very moment when the hallucination of Boris returns.

returns with the particulars of the incident. Then, a nobleman appears and announces to the Tsar the arrival of Prince Shuisky, his adviser, and formerly his accomplice. Shuisky brings bad news: the revolution grows; an imposter has appeared on the Lithuanian frontier, inciting the people against Boris, under the name of Dimitry, miraculously restored to life. The Tsar is terrified, and sends his son away; he implores Shuisky to assure him again that it was really Dimitry who was assassinated. And Shuisky, in order to reassure him, describes to him the little body, bleeding but radiant, as it was laid in the Church of Uglitch. Boris's weak nerves give way. Shuisky goes away to execute the orders of his royal master. Boris left alone, undergoes a fresh hallucination. He sees before him the corpse of his victim; he foams, and pants for breath. It is the most nerve-racking scene that has ever been presented on the stage.

The words, for the most part, are by Pushkin. All that precedes the entry of Boris as well as the episodes is by Musorgsky.

The whole of the third act is made up of subsidiary pieces. It takes place at Sandomir in the castle of the *voicvod* Mnishek, where the conspiracy against Boris is being hatched. In the first scene, Mnishek's daughter, Marina (the affianced of the false Dimitry. who is no other than Gregory), is discovered at her toilet, surrounded by her maids. The Jesuit father Rangoni is announced. In a strange, verbose, but not characterless scene

(of which the text, be it noticed, is by Musorgsky), he urges Marina, first of all, to attempt the conversion to the real faith of all the heretics of Moscow; then as she refuses this mission, Rangoni presses her to exercise a decisive influence over the young Usurper for this end. He speaks as an expert and as a cynic: Marina listens to him patiently.

Scarcely less unexpected is the scene which follows, a scene also invented by Musorgsky. It is night, and Dimitry awaits Marina near a fountain in the garden. His vigil is broken into by the artful Jesuit, eager at any price to make sure of the future of the *Roman* Church in Russia. Dimitry promises.

Then Marina comes in search of Dimitry. To his words of love she replies with an avowal of sheer ambition: it is only at the moment when the Usurper, angry at her repulses, threaten to break with her for ever, that she softens a little. The Act finishes with a love duet, to the last words of which are added an "aside" from Rangoni, who is hidden in the shadow, and is delighted with the favourable turn to his plans.

One is bound to recognize that here Musorgsky has strangely deformed a scene, which in Pushkin's work, was of the greatest beauty. Intentionally or not, he has made the character of Marina quite insipid; the personality of the false Dimitry is greatly weakened in his version, and Rangoni's intervention had no real dramatic purpose; this character does not appear again. It is only the

music of this act that is interesting; and it is often quite sufficient to make up for the weakness of the action.

The fourth act offers the same atmosphere as the first two. From the beginning, one feels that the drama is developing. Again the action takes place at Moscow in the Kremlin; but this time in the Chamber of the Duma. The boyards are having a lively discussion as to the punishment which ought to be served out to the Usurper. But where is Prince Shuisky? Shuisky arrives with apologies, and announces that Tsar Boris seems to be tortured by a ghastly vision, for he shouts, babbles, and weeps, and appears to want to flee away from the avenging apparition of the dead Tsarvitch Dimitry. The boyards are astonished and doubtful, but suddenly Boris himself appears foaming and haggard. For a moment, we have a continuation of the terrible monologue which ends the second act. Then Boris recovers a little. The message comes that an old monk is at the door, craving an audience. Perhaps the old man brings words of peace and comfort; Boris commands that he should enter.

It is Pimen. Without introduction, he tells in simple language of a miracle which has happened on the tomb of the Tsarvitch Dimitry:* "One evening a shepherd came to me, a venerable old man. He told me that from his youth he

*In Pushkin's work, this remarkable tale is preceded by some words of explanation; this miracle, he says there, evidently proves that the pretender Dimitry is an imposter, and that the Tsarvitch is really dead.

had been blind. Every remedy proved vain. But once, while he slept, he heard a child's voice say to him ' Rise, go towards the town of Uglitch, and pray on my grave: I am the Tsarvitch Dimitry: God has placed me amongst the number of his Angels . . . .' And scarcely had the shepherd prostrated himself on the tomb, than he saw once more the light of God . . . ."

A cry of anguish interrupts Pimen. Boris breaks out again, grows faint, and falls unconscious into the arms of the boyards. He calls for his son, and warns him to beware of sedition; in his agonized state of mind, he imagines that they are preparing the royal death robes. Terror and remorse, mingled with fatherly tenderness and pride in bequeathing to his son the vast Empire, shake his enfeebled frame. He prays. Bells toll. The monks intone the Funeral Hymn. The tortured soul of Boris is at last freed.

It seems that nothing can surpass the horror of this scene, but the final scene is still more tragic. In the country, the crowds of revolting people are liberated. Some ragged men have seized a boyard, and are belabouring him. Some cry; some dance. As a strange contrast, the insulting words of one moment are heard above a gentle complaining cry. Then the shouting begins again. A troop of peasant-boys chase a harmless idiot, (a *yurodivy*) tormenting him. The two monks, Varlaam and Missail, reappear, drunken, brawling, and yelling a ribald song at the top of their voices. It is a veritable scene of frenzy. Cries of " Death to

Boris" rise above the uproar. Two Roman priests pass by, singing a hymn to the Tsar Dimitry. They sing badly: it is of little consequence. A martial air resounds: The monks bawl out "Glory to thee, Tsarvitch!" and the people with them. The Usurper appears and invites the people to follow him to the Kremlin. Obsessed with an unanimous enthusiasm everyone falls down near his path. Then, almost in the twinkling of an eye, the stage is empty, and the born idiot seated on a stone, sobs out a monotonous complaint: "Flow, flow, bitter tears, flow; Weep, weep, faithful soul; and lament all, ye true believers. Soon the foe will come, bringing the darkness of night thick and gloomy. Woe, woe to Russia! Weep, weep, ye people of Russia, poor starving nation!"

The words of the last act are for the greater part by Musorgsky. Only the story of Pimen, and the scene of the ragamuffin's tormenting the simpleton, are borrowed from Pushkin. Here one sees that Musorgsky has really accomplished the work of a truly great dramatist.

Boris Godunoff is the most daring production that the Russian school has produced; and at the same time it most clearly approaches the ideal type of lyric drama dreamt of by the reformers. Cæsar Cui has given us a clear and carefully considered definition of this ideal type, one which applies almost word for word to Musorgsky's score: "Operatic music," he says, "should be true and beautiful music in itself; everything

which musical art possesses, that is most bewitching, should be made use of there . . . . The vocal music ought to be in perfect accordance with the meaning of the words . . . . Since the words vary, since each of them has its own special meaning, it is most necessary that the musical part should be intelligently appropriate . . . . The construction of the scenes ought to depend entirely on the reciprocal situation of the characters, as well as on the general movement of the piece. . . . The new Russian school. . . . is convinced that the musical development of an opera demands complete independence in form, and should only be governed by the words or the scenic situation. . . . ; the music ought not to take an independent path and be separated from the words *. . . . Besides, it endeavours to render musically the character and the type of the personages with the utmost relief, to model, as it were, each phrase of a rôle in a mould which is individual and not general ; to characterize truly, also, the historical period of the drama and to produce, in the poetical sense as well as in the exact one, the local colour, the descriptive and picturesque sides of the action. . . . Wagner concentrated all the musical interest on the orchestra . . . . the Russian musicians, on the other hand, reserve for the singers (except in some rare exceptions) all the musical supremacy."† The remainder of the chapter is less convincing,

*One sees the fundamental difference between this theory and the system carried out by Wagner in his *Ring of the Nibelungs*.

†Ceasar Cui, *Music in Russia*, pp. 74 etc.

for Cui hurls himself with energy against the Wagnerian "leading motive" and affirms that the Russian school never employs it. Yet one sees in the music of *Boris Godunoff* the presence of some very distinct leading-motives, although they may be few in number. This point set aside, Musorgsky's work conforms to the description given by Cæsar Cui. Altogether Musorgsky observes scrupulously the greater part of the principles which are announced even in his shortest songs; the other Cui principles, those relative to the action, are followed in a very elementary way. And the music of *Boris*, notwithstanding the freedom of writing (which only shocks the ultra-purists) is really and truly beautiful music, rich in all possible resources—except symphonic development in the music of the drama, which the modern school tends more and more to reject.

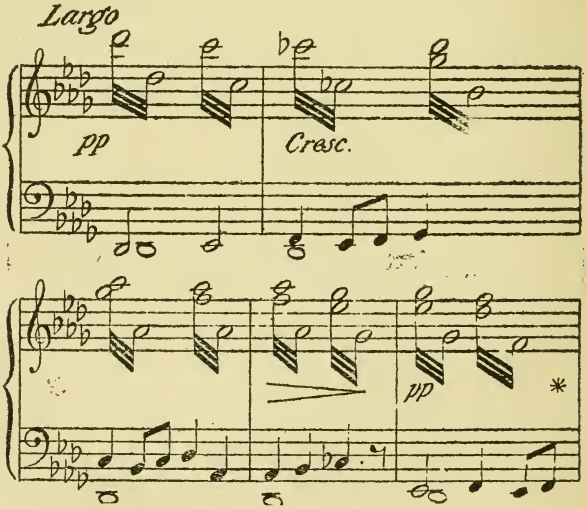
So one will not find in the score of *Boris Godunoff* any of the divisions of traditional opera, nor the characteristic arrangement, of Wagner's dramas, which are so stylized in every respect. Everything in *Boris* is abrupt, direct, rapid, and suitably simple. The inflection of the melodic line, the atmospheric suggestion, and the general movement occasionally combined with a rather more complex one, even in the accompaniment, these are nearly the only elements which the artist has employed. One will hardly find any trace of musical commentary, apart from the preparatory device. About twenty preludial bars, during which one hears nothing but the theme of a folk-song

simply treated, and then the action begins straight away. After that, the sentences of the text flow on almost without interruption; and it is only when quite appropriate, and that on very rare occasions, that the orchestra plays a few bars alone between the incidents or between the questions and the replies. And even at the end of the scenes, or of the acts, the dialogue is scarcely concluded when the orchestra stops, without even a formal conclusion. Musorgsky's music (in spite of the mimetic character which one often finds there) does not here favour any prolonged play of a mimetic nature: thus, in the first scene, five bars of orchestral preparation, are sufficient for the whole performance of the scene necessitated by the appearance of the Chief Secretary of the Duma, impressive as it is. In the first scene of Act I, a few bars are sufficient to establish the musical atmosphere, and it is the same at the beginning of the Garden Scene (Act III). There is no introduction to the second or the third acts. The short preludes of the second scene of Act I (the inn), the two scenes of Act IV (The Duma and On the Road) scarcely consist of anything but a few touches suggesting the general tone and the movement of the scenes which they precede; it is the same for the opening of the scene of Boris's Coronation, an admirable piece where the orchestra combines with the bells at full peal.

In the second act, the entrance of the monks and of the police, the varied scenic events, Gregory's flight, are all accomplished without any

interruption of the dialogue. And it is the same further on, with the entries of the exits of Boris, of Shuisky, of Rangoni. In the whole of the final scene, the voices do not stop for a moment, until the appearance of the triumphant Usurper, which is prepared for by about twelve bars of orchestration. And scarcely has the last clamour of the crowd died away than the poor village idiot, left all alone, intones his melancholy dirge.

The smallest exceptions from this definite attitude have a very profound reason for their existence and explain themselves; for example, the isolated bars during which Pimen's voice is silent in the first act; the four solemn bars which precede



*Rimsky-Korsakoff altered the part-writing and barring of this considerably in his revision of the work. (A.E.H.)

the monk's story in the fourth act; at the end of the same scene, there are again some bars for orchestra alone, interpolated between the last words of the dying Tsar. And, when the curtain falls, at the end of the agony, the orchestra gives out briefly the only musical commentary which is to be found in the whole score; a slow, sad repetition of one of the hero's motives, the one which has expressed the glory of the imperial power.

One asks oneself if, even used in so small a degree, the method closely conformed to Musorgsky's realistic intentions; if it is not, on the contrary, essentially false, since in reality, dialogues, discussions, situations, do not succeed one another in a manner so completely close. The objection would be valid if the artistic realism consisted of a servile imitation of reality. It is sufficient to refer to the definition, to see how appropriate, on the contrary is the attitude taken by Musorgsky; it leaves no place for emotional commentary, nor for rhetorical amplification. From the material point of view, it constitutes a simplification analagous to that which all dramatic words undergo; in actual life, many more words are necessary than the heroes of dramatic literature ever pronounce on the stage, where only the essentials are retained. It has also that other advantage of not imposing too slow a movement on the actors, nor forcing them into conventional attitudes.

In every work of art the interest therein should be judiciously distributed. If the work be of considerable proportions, it ought to consist not

only of contrasts, but also of points of rest; a uniform tension would be fatiguing for the listener, producing an impression of dryness, and of artificiality, harmful to the æsthetic result. In the quotation of the artistic creed already given as accepted by the school, Cæsar Cui expressly declares that "The Russian school refuses to make concessions to the listener, to spare him any weariness of a too sustained attention." We must not take this literally, although in considering the uniformity of treatment adopted in *Boris Godunoff* one would fear at first that it would result in some excess of tension. Happily that is not the case. Of interludes in the strict sense of the word, there is only one: in the third act, when the guests go to the palace (*Allegro alla polacca* for orchestra). But the scenes are constituted nearly entirely of lyric episodes, sometimes being attached to the action (Pimen's story, and to a certain extent the chorus of the last act), sometimes uniquely picturesque (first part of the scene *In the Inn*; the Tsar's children with the nurse; and the whole of the third act, where there is little else).

The way in which the various scenes of the work are treated helps to vary it in every needful way. Fun has been made of the continuous *melodic recitative* extolled by the founders of the Russian national school, and of which the first example was given by Dargomisky in his *Statue Guest*. Whilst conforming to this method, which only implies renouncing everything which is conventional and consequently false in the musical drama,

let it be understood that Musorgsky from the dramatic point of view is never sparing of his music where abundance of music is called for. By the side of long scenes of pure recitative, but where the music does not cease for a moment to produce atmosphere, and to express emotions (In the monk's cell), one will find in *Boris* some pages entirely lyrical in style (rôle of Boris in the second act ; Rangoni's persuasive appeal in the third act, etc.) without mentioning songs in stanzas, and Marina's long song, which will be dealt with later on. Sometimes the orchestra is confined to playing a very simple accompaniment, although more often it is significant in itself ; sometimes it takes supreme importance, and in spite of the slight complexity of symphonic work, constitutes by itself alone, a rich and complete ensemble (Boris's hallucinations). The numerous choral scenes are of an incomparable musical magnificence ; and the last scene constitutes from beginning to end a prodigious symphony of which no words can describe either the power or the beauty.

Besides, even in the least laden parts, the instrumental accompaniment is more often melodic in the broad sense of the word. Frequently, the melody flows along as freely and clearly as in the vocal parts : for example, in the lyric passages and in the choruses. In other passages, it is independent, more fluid, suggestive rather than definite (In the monk's cell, In the garden). Sometimes also the music surges along with a full singing flow, in order to express certain moments of deep emotion : for

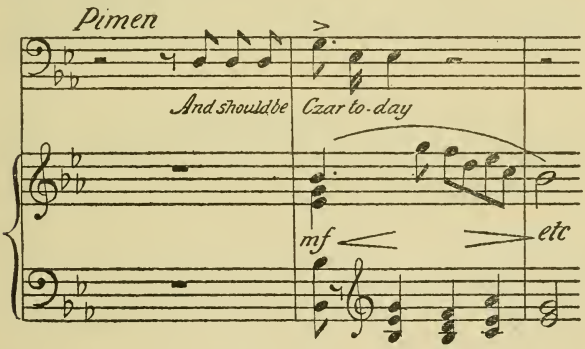
example, in the second act, during the dialogue between Boris and his son, it sings with an infinite gentleness, suggesting paternal tenderness. When Boris is alone, the accompaniment reproduces by means as suitable as simple, the terror, the remorse, and the anguish of Boris (second and fourth acts). Lastly, this accompaniment contains *leading motives* of which Musorgsky has made a sparing use sufficient, however, to increase greatly both the unity and the expressive power of the music.

The unity of the work is not brought about only by the method of reminiscences which, although very systematic and ingenious, can only in the case of dramatic music be but superficial. *Boris Godunoff*, despite the almost bewildering diversity, preserves a complete unity of style on which all the details are founded. Nothing is more nearly allied to the spirit (and also to the general tonality) of the music than the various scenes where the crowd, the protagonist of the drama, as we have already said, appears—whether in a seething mass, as at the beginning and end of the work, or whether represented by some characteristic types such as Missail, Varlaam, the Hostess in the second act, the *boyards* in the third. In the same way, one notices the skilful analogy of the free dialogues, with the general style and spirit—the third act once more standing out in this respect. The personality of Boris too, is treated in a marvellously balanced and co-ordinated fashion; and although he appears comparatively seldom, he might be as passive in the face of destiny as is Wotan in *Sieg-*

fried; he remains present nevertheless in the spectator's mind exactly the same way as does the "Wanderer."

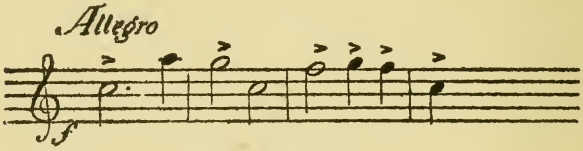
In these varied and profound unifying causes, in the direct and expressive value of the music, the leading-motives perform in a certain measure their normal functions. That is, they strengthen the organic unity and the expression of the mental impressions which result from the opportune associations of ideas which they provoke.

Of these leading motives, one alone plays a really important part: it first appears in the orchestra at the time when Gregory speaks to Pimen of the assassinated Tsarvitch:—



after having been sketched in a less precise form at the moment when Boris speaks before the people who acclaim him (p. 27 in the piano score, *original* edition). It re-appears in the prelude to the scene of the Inn (p. 50), at the entrance of Gregory (p. 56), and several times in the course of the same

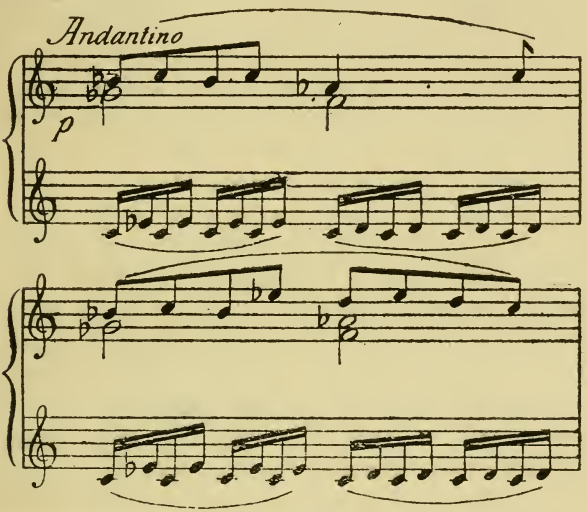
scene (pp. 63, 64, 70, 74). One hears it again at the moment when Shuisky pronounces Dimitry's name (p. 113), towards the end of the first hallucination of Boris (p. 123), at the beginning of the Scene in the Garden (pp. 144, 145) newly associated with the personality of the Usurper, at the time when Boris, in his hallucination, enters the Chamber of the Duma (p. 193), during Pimen's story (pp. 198, 199). Lastly, a visibly melodic form, derived from the one mentioned above, but of more heroic character, a little conventional:



seems intended to characterize the Usurper's triumph. It appears first when the latter thinks of the coming struggle (pp. 169, 170) and returns on pages 178 and 246. One will notice several other uses of the same musical idea, modified in various ways, in studying the score.

This thematic treatment is on the whole a little different from the "leading-motive" system of Wagner: it is a most deeply plastic element, of a chiefly expressive importance in a very extended way. Its original rôle is to recall the memory of the assassinated Tsar; but it soon loses this strict signification by association with Gregory's ambition, as well as with Boris's remorse.

Other themes attached to Boris express : paternal love (p. 95 under the words of Féodor, *Here is Moscow, here is Novgorod*) : it deserves to be quoted for its intrinsic beauty :



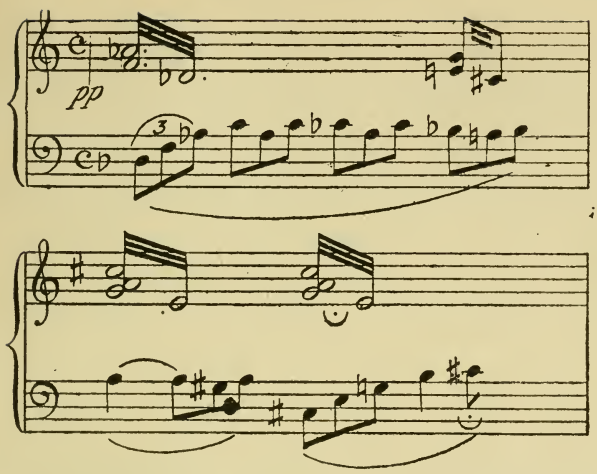
two others, the Imperial power. At the moment of Boris's death these three themes reappear, and form a powerful element of pathos. (pp. 200-206.)

There is no intention here of establishing one of those " thematic guides " which have their good and bad points, and of which the least defect is that of raising merely pleasing and simple coincidences to the rank of discoveries. But, on the other hand, to abstain from revealing these evident uses of the leading-motive would be to leave out of sight one of the interesting aspects of Musorgsky's

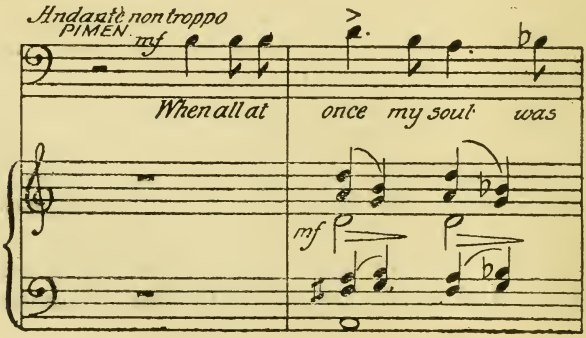
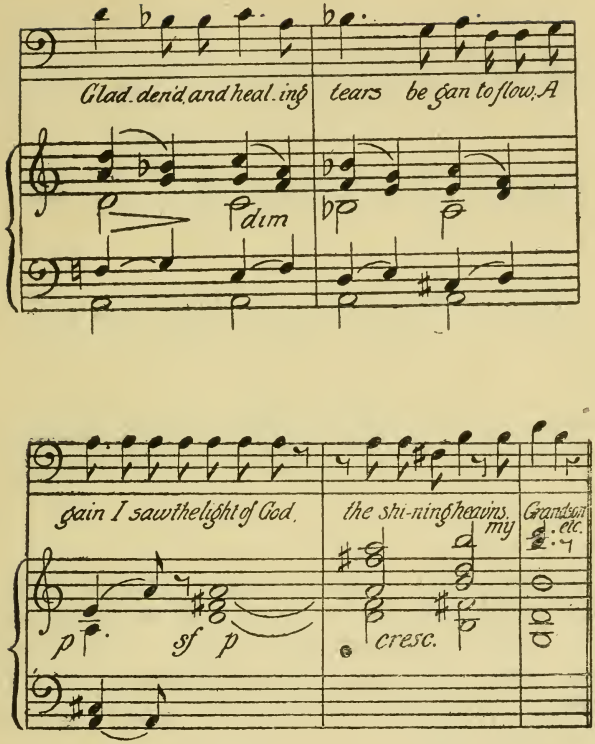
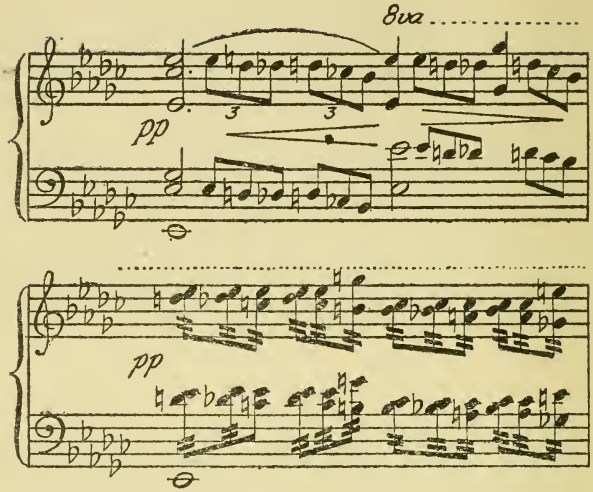
dramatic invention. There is no reason for laying stress on the secondary themes: that of Pimen, a slow and solemn phrase which is sounded afresh when the monk advances in the middle of the Duma; that of Shuisky, carefully used on every suitable occasion (pp. 111, 187, 195). A rhythmic figure is even appropriated for the appearances of the police-officers (pp. 2 and 69) which surely must be taken as pure caricature, especially when we consider Musorgsky's extreme scrupulousness in the matter of musical characteristics.*

The whole score bears witness to this constant care. The themes quoted above are all remarkable for their exactness of expression, the same as the principal melodic elements of each of the scenes. Thus, at the time when the cunning Rangoni invites Marina to employ all the seductions of love (pp. 139, 140) and seeks to inflame the imagination of the Usurper (pp. 148–153), the music (p. 173) becomes extraordinarily sensuous and compelling—much more so than in the love duet which ends the act; the situation there being more ordinary, has not so happily inspired Musorgsky.

Guided by the same purpose of exact characterization, Musorgsky makes Marina sing (first scene of the third act) a brilliant but fanciful mazurka,

*A letter already quoted from Musorgsky to Cæsar Cui (July 3rd, 1868), contains a passage which shows the exact conception which the composer had of the characteristic leading-motive: "I have found for Podkolessin a very successful orchestral phrase . . . . it appears for the first time in the conversation with Stepan under the words: 'I have asked nothing!' (with regard to the marriage) and bursts out in the third act, during the negotiations, when Podkolessin has decided to marry. Thus it becomes very easy to represent the silly fluster of the character"

which although doubtless very suitable to the character of the cold and superficial girl, is nevertheless, owing to the banality of the music, a serious blot on the work. The thematic intention, however, is proved by the return of the Polonaise theme, (vocal score, pp. 138, 173, 175) and it is evident from examination of all the other additions which Musorgsky made to *Boris Godunoff* that this is the unique concession to the poor taste of a section of the public.

Never has Musorgsky's style been more sustained, more grateful, richer in originality and power than in *Boris Godunoff*. A marvellous penetration is revealed in the thousand discoveries of suggestion and expression which we find throughout the the score. And it is all music in the completest sense of the word. In studying the composers'

songs after his instrumental works, one notices certain weaknesses of musical invention: one can see that Musorgsky is content sometimes with quasi-phonographic translations of the words, or rudimentary transcriptions of gesture or of movement. It would be impossible to find a single passage of the same kind in *Boris Godunoff*. The tragic parts of the work, the humorous or homely parts of the work, are as intrinsically beautiful as Musorgsky's most admirable songs: the *Hopak*, the *Peasant's Cradle-Song*, *Sunless*, *Dances of Death etc.*, and they also offer convincing proof of the musical heights to which the author was capable of rising, side by side with the elaborately grouped scenes, such as those which form the prologue—the first alone, by the daring and simplicity of its means, constitutes a veritable revelation—as does the heartrending stroke of the finale which occurs in the intimate and concentrated scene of the dialogue in Pimen's cell. Or take again the prodigious recitative of which this is the culminating point:

When one hears this music, where there is almost nothing material, one recognizes again the mark of genius. At the moment where Boris appears distraught, gasping, a weak *tremolo* of strings, better than the most tedious crashing of cymbals, reproduces the boundlessness of his anguish :

Where purely dynamic means, so easy and so often misplaced, are necessary—for example when the crowd of revolutionaries rebel; they are used where they have not then the character of a too carefully prepared rhetoric, but possess a more elementary force.

Boris Godunoff is a distinctly Russian work; not merely by virtue of the locality of the subject, but by the spirit of the whole drama, the character of the people, the aspect under which the events happen. The suitability of the music in this drama is of no superficial order, and results in anything but a partizanship of folk-music. Certainly the

modes, the rhythms, the melodic curves, have something special which no one can mistake. It is impossible to produce, in a work of art, a race which has no marked characteristics, whose passion and actions reveal no personality. That collection of traits which constitutes the soul of the race, also exists in the souls of the individuals, in that of the Tsar Boris who is here revealed to us; in that of Musorgsky of whose mind the work is but the reflection. The "national character" which is the central idea of Pushkin's drama, is realized by Musorgsky with the utmost freedom and fulness; it is the very life-blood of the opera.

To define this musical drama—rugged, crude, violent, even jerky, from various aspects, ignoring all skill and all mere arrangement and management, of which the music is sometimes of epic grandeur and sometimes offers subtleties of expression so audacious that the most modern composers have not exceeded them:—it is a "masterpiece." Everything is powerful and spontaneous; it all constitutes a sincere and moving picture of life. The strength of its vitality submerges weaknesses of detail which a critic could point out, only by insisting on insignificant details outweighing the beauty of the whole. Musorgsky, the uncouth, the unfinished, the musical nihilist (the word has been used of him in Russia and elsewhere) is in this score equal to the greatest, to those whose glory is beyond comparison and above all ingratitude. If there could be anything to be compared

with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, it would be *Boris Godunoff*.*

Khovanshchina.

Like *Boris Godunoff*, *Khovanshchina* calls up one of the most dramatic and one of the most gloomy periods in the national history. It contains scenes which follow faithfully the various aspects of the life of the Russian people. But there is scarcely any other analogy between the two works. *Boris Godunoff* was entitled: "a popular musical drama." However, in contradiction to what one would suppose from these indications, the latter work in many respects conforms more to the traditions of the lyric theatre: it contains however a single plot, or at least a regularly developing action, of which the progress occupies quite the whole work. The principal characters always keep strictly to the main plan of sharing effectively the progress of the action. Also, the music is somewhat more classical, but rather from the point of view of substance than that of form.

As the history of the composition of *Khovansh-*

*In 1896 a new edition of *Boris Godunoff* appeared revised and "touched-up" by Rimsky-Korsakoff. Some of the changes which one notices there have a purely practical object, that is to facilitate performance; others have no other motive than the desire to mitigate the unusual aspect of the work, to make it less disconcerting for the public, and more in conformance with the "rules." An edition of 1908 with French words partly repairs the damage, but it is to the words of 1875 *only* that reference should be made, if we would know *Boris Godunoff* as Musorgsky wrote it.

china shows, the version which we possess is incomplete in many respects, and there is no doubt that Musorgsky, if he had been given time and strength, would have produced in the end something quite different: not only would he have suppressed many passages in the libretto with the object of ridding himself of a task which bored him but he would certainly have worked out the accompaniments in a less tame way, enriched the harmonic combinations, and, in a word, given more colour to his music.

In spite of all these breaks, *Khovanshchina* remains a work of great beauty, very special in character, even unique in certain respects. This particular period in the history of the Russian people is traced, not by a set of telling pictures (as in *Boris Godunoff*) but in its true development, under the most general aspect so to speak, and the part taken by the surroundings is much more uniform.

Once more—although Musorgsky has remained faithful to his plan of only rendering actual history—it is not without use for the due comprehension of the work to become acquainted with the complex interweaving of events which it portrays.

The action takes place between the years 1682 and 1689, and gives a picture of the religious and social struggles of the period.

Tsar Féodor has died without leaving a direct heir. The throne returned to his younger brother Peter, to the disadvantage of the two elder children, Ivan and Sophia. Sophia soon raised a riot

of the Archers Regiments (Streltsy) who belonged mostly to the sect of the Old Believers (Raskolniky) and with their chief, the Prince Ivan Khovansky, represented the old traditional and uneducated Russia. The opposing side—that of the Tsar Peter—was, on the contrary, imbued with more Western tendencies. Sophia succeeded in assuming the regency; but soon after this, Prince Khovansky raised a fresh rebellion in the favour of his son Andrew. Ivan Khovansky was treacherously killed, and the Imperial troops succeeded in definitely defeating the revolutionaries, the ignorant and simple Old Believers, who, convinced of the coming of Anti-Christ, had recourse to suicide in large numbers. Tsar Peter the Great, applied the name *Khovanshchina* to this long series of intrigue and struggles, in which Prince Khovansky played an important rôle.

Stassoff, struck by the interest of such a subject, sent Musorgsky a complete plan of it: "I propose," he says, "to place in the centre of the action the great figure of Dositheus, the leader of the Old Believers, a strong, energetic, deeply intelligent, and experienced man, whose powerful influence controlled the actions of the two princes: Khovansky (representing the old, gloomy, fanatic, sleeping Russia) and Galitsin, (representing the European type of mind on the side of the Empress Regent Sophia). Various characters; the events which happen in the Germans' quarters, and those of the Archers (Streltsy); the pastor and his old sister, and young nephews; the two women, Old Be-

lievers—one Martha, full of youth and of passion (somewhat like the wife of Potiphar), the other, Susan, uninteresting, sallow, evil and fanatic—both incessantly quarrelling; young Peter, then aged ten years, with his play-fellows; Sophia, energetic and artful, with her fierce Archers; the Old Believers, their suicide *en masse* when Dositheus recognises that Old Russia perishes: the new Russia is born—all that appeared to me a fertile subject."

If Musorgsky had utilised this whole canvas, his work would have been even more complex, more picturesque, more brightly coloured than *Boris Godunoff*. But after 1875, when he was anxious to compose *The Fair of Sorotchinsk*, and being very weak he made unjustifiable cuts, in order to finish this work at all costs, not suppressing what was useless, but just leaving out what was not already written out, without the least care for the integrity or the clearness of the drama as a whole. Neither Sophia nor Peter appear there, any more than certain other secondary characters suggested by Stassoff. Martha has not the character originally proposed for her. The most important rôle is given to the monks and to their leader Dositheus, but a romantic love affair is mingled with the principal subject of the action.

The opera begins with a scene in the Red Square at Moscow. Night is departing. Three Archers gossip and joke together amid bursts of uproarious laughter. At day-break, a public letterwriter arrives. The Archers disappear after good-natured

and scoffing salutations. Soon a new character appears—the Boyard Tchaklovity, who, with a thousand threats and under the seal of the greatest secrecy, orders the letterwriter to draw up a denunciation of the Princes Ivan and Andrew Khovansky, the hatchers of the plot against the Tsar. While he writes, workmen pass, then some of the Archers. The letter-writer is seized with a curious dread, but finishes the letter as well as he can: Tchaklovity seizes it and goes out. A warlike rhythm is heard, the people gather together, the Archers return and in the midst of a chorus of acclamations, the imperious Prince Ivan Khovansky appears. With persuasive words he inflames the people, exhorts them to fight and conquer the revolution provoked by the Boyards in favour of Peter. Khovansky then retires, followed by an enthusiastic crowd. Suddenly a girl rushes in, panting; she is pursued by Prince Andrew Khovansky. It is Emma, a Lutheran. To the words of love which the young man addressed to her, she replies with bitterness: "I know you well: you are Prince Khovansky; you have killed my father, banished my lover; you did not even take pity on my poor mother. . . . I am in your hands: kill me!" Andrew becomes more and more pressing. He is interrupted by Martha, who reproaches him bitterly with being unfaithful to his former vows. Furiously he springs at her, trying to stab her with a dagger. She stops him, and with a blow, snatches the weapon from him. Then as in a dream, she begins a mystic oration, a vague but threatening

prediction. Andrew remains rooted with terror to the spot.

Meanwhile, Prince Ivan Khavonsky appears, always at the head of some Archers. He salutes his son and Martha in a friendly way. Then, perceiving Emma: "You are not alone, Andrew? With a pretty girl? A girl of fair complexion. . . . She pleases us . . . . Archers. Lead her to the guard-room." "Never!" shouts Andrew. The father and son dispute fiercely, nearly coming to blows, but Dositheus enters unexpectedly, surrounded by his followers, the Old Believers. He soothes the two Princes, orders Martha to take Emma to the shelter of her own home, and to protect her as a daughter. Then he protests harshly against the sins of the time, bewailing the weakening of faith. He exhorts his hearers to unite in order to ensure the triumph of the Orthodox (ancient) Church.

Prince Ivan, with some brief orders, hurries his troops away towards the Kremlin. Dositheus, left alone with his followers, prays God not to allow the triumph of the evil forces, and to vouchsafe protection to the faithful. He asks the Old Believers to intone the Hymn of Renunciation to the World. And the hymn rises: "Father, save us from the words of Satan, the tempting powers, the Anti-Christ."

The second act takes place in Prince Galitsin's house. The rising curtain discloses the Prince in his study, reading a very touching letter from the Empress-Regent Sophia, and he comments

on its affectionate terms with scepticism. Sophia is, above all, ambitious for power, he says to himself, and one cannot be too prudent. However, the arrival of the clair-voyant invited by him is announced to the Prince. It is Martha, the Old Believer. After a solemn incantation over a bowl of water, she predicts Galitsin's disgrace and shameful exile. When she retires, the enraged Galitsin orders his valet to follow and seize her, and drown her in the marsh. Left alone, Galitzin becomes alarmed at the melancholy destiny which has been predicted for him, and he trembles before his approaching ruin. He is plunged into gloom as he ponders on the futility of his efforts to assure peace to Russia, and to consolidate relationship with the European Powers . . . .

Prince Ivan Khovansky enters suddenly. With the opening words, he takes an offensive tone, complaining of Galitsin's measures against the Boyards ; Galitsin replies in a conciliatory manner, but cut to the quick by Khavansky's insolence, he becomes thoroughly roused and returns sarcasm for sarcasm. Dositheus enters, and listens to the discussion for some moments, unmoved. Then he interrupts the disputants : anger and reproaches are useless. There is only one way to remedy the evils which overwhelm Russia ; to respect the old customs, the old books, and for the rest to listen to the voice of the people. Whilst the three men argue, the Hymn of the Old Believers is heard in the distance. . . . " You, Boyards, are only fit for talking. They are the people who work," says

Dositheus, and he intones the canticle in his turn . . "Courage to the brave!" exclaims Khovansky. Galitsin becomes uneasy. Suddenly distressful cries are heard. Martha returns enraged, and informs them that her life has been attempted, and that she has been saved by nobles of the Imperial party. Her story is interrupted by the arrival of the Boyard Tchaklovity, who comes to announce that the Empress Regent knows of the rebellion of the Khavansky princes: Tsar Peter has ordered the guilty ones to be captured.

In the third act, the scene is in the Archers' Quarters of the city. The Old Believers pass along, always singing their canticle. Amongst them is Martha, who stops and sits down on the steps of Andrew Khovansky's house, and sings a plaintive air in which she tells of her betrayed love and her coming vengeance. The dull and fanatic sister Susan arrives. She is bitterly indignant over Martha's love reminiscences, and threatens her with the Church's chastisements. Once more, Dositheus appears and says some appeasing words. When Susan has gone, he interrogates Martha who avows her love for Prince Andrew. She dreams, she adds, of a coming Purification by Fire, and begs Dositheus to save her sinful soul. The old monk exhorts her to resignation.

The stage now empty, Tchaklovity enters unexpectedly and, moved by Russia's misfortunes, prays God to protect his unhappy country. Some Archers enter noisily, full of brutal gaiety. A group of women follows, uttering piercing cries.

Now the letterwriter enraged and breathless, rushes in: The Tsar's soldiers have surrounded the Archers and have beaten them. Ivan Khovansky appears at a window. He tells his soldiers that all resistance is for the time being in vain, and advises them to go home and await the Tsar's decision.

The fourth act is divided into two scenes. The first represents a room in Khovansky's country mansion. Prince Ivan Khovansky is seated before a festive board. To distract himself from gloomy thoughts, he calls for his singers, and orders them to sing their most entrancing songs. The feast is interrupted by the arrival of a messenger who comes from Galitsin to announce the imminent danger to Khovansky, but he shrugs his shoulders, believes it to be a mere intimidation, discharges the messenger, and calls for his Persian dancers. Soon Tchaklovity appears, tells Khovansky that the Empress-Regent wishes for his advice in council. The Prince hails it as a return of fortune, and puts on his festive robes. By his orders, the singers voice a Hymn of Glorification. "It swims, the white swan swims, Ladu, Ladu. . . . Sing the white swan's glory. Ladu, Ladu." But a cry interrupts the song, for as the Prince approaches the door, he is stabbed by assassins. Tchaklovity approaches the corpse, and with somewhat bitter irony, murmurs while looking at it: "Ha! the white swan's glory, Ladu, Ladu!"

The second scene is set in a public square at Moscow, thronged with people. A convoy of

exiles, surrounded by soldiers passes ; Dositheus, mingling amongst the people, is depressed at the sight of the formerly all-powerful Galitsin amongst the exiles. Martha warns Dositheus of a new danger : the soldiers have received orders to seize all the Old Believers, and put them to death. But Dositheus decides that death shall be self-inflicted. " The time has come," he cries, " to conquer by the flame of the funeral pyre ; the dawn of eternal glory is at hand. Martha, take Prince Andrew with you. No weakness and no sentiment. Courage, and you shall have an aureole of glory ! " Then he withdraws. Andrew Khovansky arrives, and anxiously interrogates Martha as to Emma's whereabouts. She tells him that the girl has been taken prisoner under threat of death by the Imperial soldiers. Andrew, consumed with rage, sounds a bugle calling the Archers together and orders them to seize Martha. There is no movement at first. Then to the sound of a passing bell, appears a procession formed of soldiers, carrying axes and blocks, guarding the condemned Archers. They range themselves before a herald, who, to their surprise, announces that, by the clemency of the Tsars Ivan and Peter, all are pardoned, and each may go to his own home and offer prayers for their sovereigns.

The scene of the last act represents the hermitage of the Old Believers, in the midst of a wood. Dositheus prepares a message of salutation to mankind. All the Old Believers wish to die rather than renounce the Old Faith. Dositheus re-

assembles his followers, exhorts them to put on the old priestly vestments, and to submit to the last test for the glory of God. A Hymn of Exultation breaks out : all go willingly to martyrdom. Martha remains alone, still dreaming of her love for Andrew, whom she cannot forget, even in the hour of death. And then it happens that Andrew approaching, mistakes her for Emma, whom he is seeking. Martha, throwing herself upon him in loving embraces, is transported with the thought of being united to him in death. The trumpets of the imperial soldiers sound in the distance. The Old Believers have built their pyre. Martha hurries the vainly struggling Andrew away. For the last time, the Old Believers' canticle is heard, whilst the military fanfares draw nearer. The pyre flames up, and at the moment when the soldiers appear on the scene, the sacrifice is ended. The curtain falls to the joyful sound of their traditional military march.

All this is strange, obscure in parts, but coherent on the whole, and, above all, very impressive. The different personages have very representative characters and the whole constitutes a striking picture of the various aspects of Russian mentality : the two Khovanskys, jovial, wilful, brutal ; the elegant and discreet Galitsin ; Martha, the fervent mystic ; Dositheus, firm and calm in his faith ; the supernumeraries, even marked with the various tendencies which they incarnate, although the psychology of each may be a little rudimentary. They are all necessary to the drama, which is

very effectively brought about by the conflict of their wills and their actions.

In a general way, one might say that *Khovanshchina* is perhaps more "theatrical" than *Boris Godunoff*. The gradation of interest there is regular; the plot is as compact as it is varied. Comparison of the music of these two operas is difficult, for nothing could be more dissimilar. They have certain qualities in common; the methods in each are direct, rapid and simple. It is useless to comment at length on the conscious *æsthetic* procedure in *Khovanshchina*, the results of which have already been analysed in some detail. But the beauty of this work is more discreet, more austere than that of *Boris*. Its musical matter is not so sumptuous, nor is it carried out with so great a freedom. The whole differs less from the traditional opera types than does *Boris*. It is not a little surprising after considering the exceptional and luxuriant *Boris Godunoff* to recognise this moderation, the classicism of form, style and means in this later work.

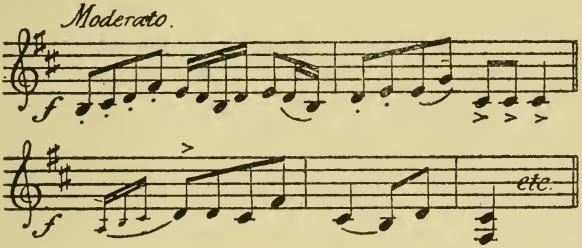
The first striking feature is the comparative regularity in the rhythm, the melodic curves, and the phrasing; the symmetry with which the scenes and the harangues are arranged; the grouping of soloists, arranged in an almost conventional manner, and some slightly new details in certain expressional procedures. The tonal setting is chiefly established in a way to exclude that rich "omnitonality" which forms one of the great attractions of *Boris Godunoff*; the harmonies too

are more sombre, and in the setting-out of the accompaniments, doublings, as well as unisons, appear with some frequency. The melodic motives are sometimes formed simply from notes of the common chord, a method which Musorgsky scarcely ever uses elsewhere. The recitatives also are left more bare.

One cannot recognise this particular character of *Khovanshchina* as a mere *accident*. Musorgsky wished that his work should offer by this means a faithful representation of the rough and mystic atmosphere of the Old Believers. He has utilised many of the old epic or religious themes, whose debased style he has retained ; and he has conceived all his music in such a way that nothing essential shall detract from the general outlook resulting from the character of the main subject.

We must not, then, expect the same kind of artistic pleasure from it as we derive from *Boris Godunoff* ; but *Khovanshchina* offers no less material for strong emotions of a high order. There is less music than in *Boris*, less sonorous richness and genuine intuition ; but the whole is perhaps nearer to pure, constructed, developed, and sustained music. One may love *Khovanshchina* less profoundly, but the work deserves an equal admiration. Its manifestations of real musical feeling are many ; take the opening of the first scene, where a few notes suffice to " place " the simple and quiet locality (page 6, piano score) ; Dositheus' harangues and those of the Old Believers, especially that which finishes the first act (pp. 62-63) ;

Martha's song full of intimate lyricism (p. 107); the scene where the prisoners pass in procession (pp. 168-169). For astonishing simplicity, we must give prominence also to the moment when Khovansky is assassinated (p. 166); and unstinted praise must be lavished on the highly original chorus of the third scene (p. 26 *et seq*); the brutal music denoting the entry of Khovansky (p. 35).



the less archaic themes which appear in the second act in the scene with Galitsin (pp. 64 *et seq.*) lastly, the grandiose mystic chorus of the Old Believers, and the tearful chorus of the Archers' wives (p. 180). Certain scenes from *Khovanshchina* are comparable, by their full and free flow, to some pieces in *Boris Godunoff*. One could quote for example the whole of the second number of the first act, with the familiar colloquies and movements which enliven it; the sixth number of the third act (p. 119, *et seq.*), and perhaps several others besides. One specifies them briefly, because Musorgsky had no longer the drama with its numerous episodes and its various aspects for his chief object. The drama is strong there; it is

the chief interest of *Khovanshchina,* but the work appears to be (if one can disregard certain aspects) a little too "operatic" for the musical resuscitation of such a period and such an atmosphere. Musorgsky adopted a method of significant traits, because he wished his work to have a certain character; and he succeeded in unifying the whole. Several special motives which characterize the method and the mood of the chief characters, of Khovansky, of his Archers (the Streltsy), of the Old Believers, reappear in a persistent manner in the course of the five acts, and are sometimes treated to embryonic developments.* They form the chief part of the musical substance. This shows without doubt that Musorgsky is completely occupied with expression in music, with expression rather than accentuation, and with dramatic movement. So he sets aside quite perceptibly, the realistic method which is customary with him, and only remains faithful to it by the spirit of sincerity and simplicity, which animates the fine moments in *Khovanshchina.*

This partial change of attitude allows a freer field of lyricism in the real sense, and the lyric pages, *ensemble* or solo, are fairly numerous in *Khovanshchina.* There is another result; it permits the inclusion of the conventional elements already pointed out. But we must not forget

*For example, the motive mentioned before (c.f. pages 35, 53-54, 141, 145, 150, 163, 179, of the full score). Notice the similarity which it offers to other themes treated in words of the same epic archaic character: for example, Borodin's *Symphony in* B *minor,* or Liapunoff's *Epic Song.*

that *Khovanshchina* was not finished, and Musorgsky, in other circumstances perhaps would have revised, enriched and animated it. And in spite of all the criticisms which one could formulate, the work remains noble, powerful, and in many respects, original. It is not unworthy of the author of *Boris Godunoff*.

CHAPTER VII.

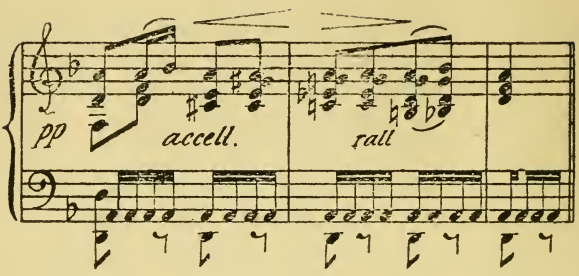
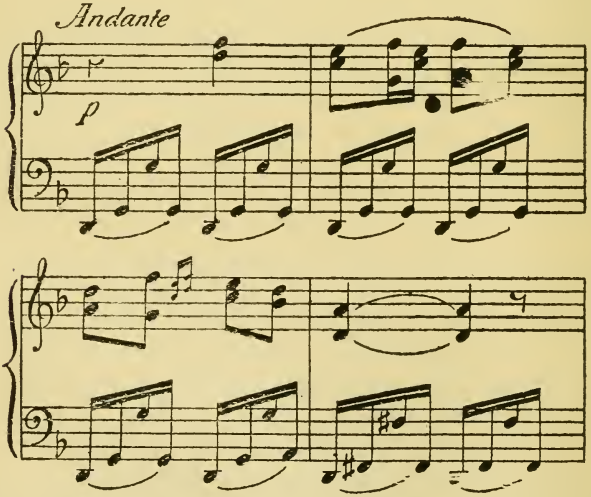
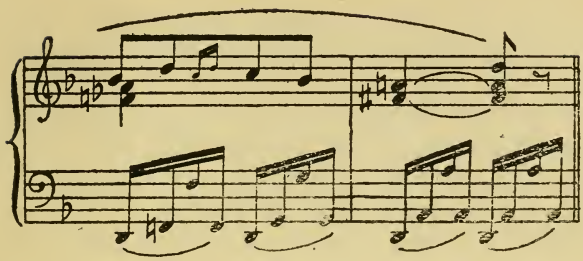
MUSORGSKY THE MUSICIAN.

To reproach Musorgsky with only being able to achieve his works, even to invent musical elements, in those particular circumstances where the words or the rhythmic ideas gave him support, would be to take the utterly unjustifiable stand of a personal bias. No *à priori* conception of his music, of his limits, and of his aim, can serve as a basis for a just appraisement: it is artistic feeling alone which allows us to estimate the value of an artist from the outlook he takes, without asking if he ought to take it. *Has Musorgsky created anything? What has he created? What is the value of his creations to the unbiassed mind?* These are the only questions which a critic may put.

To study him as a musician, it is allowable to lay aside for a moment the question of the emotional effect which his works produce. It is needless to explain once more that, outside the instrumental music, the intrinsic nature of the musical interest can be argued each time, if, instead of thinkingt of the music alone, one thinks of the subject which it illustrates, and which at the first acquaintance veils its weaknesses. In certain of Musorgsky's

works, and these not the least moving—for example, *The Orphan Beggar Child*—all the power is in the words; the only merit of the music is in never lessening the verbal appeal: a singular merit, too, which shows the artist's fine personality. To give Musorgsky his proper place, not only in the history of music, but in the history of art, there are other questions to be considered. The brief survey of his songs and dramas has shown in some respects that certain grounds for argument are possible. It has been necessary to pass rapidly over the actual beauty of his music, and the short examples quoted can only give a slight idea of the striking and fertile originality, of the varied and multiplied richness, by which his music is characterized.

Musorgsky is one of the greatest inventors of musical elements, of melodic curves, or of new and expressive harmonies,* who has ever lived. Sometimes, his admirable discoveries are scattered about fitfully; sometimes they are gathered together in a song or in a scene from a drama. It is in the banal pieces, like the romance *Night*, that some detail, unforgettable for its musicality and its daring, crops up. Even in the most beautiful pieces which one must wholly admire, there are some things which attract special attention, for example, the astonishing effect of the simple pedal-note *B* at the beginning of the *Serenade*; in the *Trépak*, this harmonic progression:

*There are also in his work some beautiful examples of rhythmic invention, but apart from the rhythm of the musical declamation, their number is very small.

and also the harmonization of the whole of the final part, *Andante Tranquillo*, of which this is a typical fragment :

Almost the whole of the *Elegy* might be thus taken, and each motive of *On the Water*. We could quote endless passages too from *Boris Godunoff* alone.

It is chiefly in tonal and harmonic feeling that Musorgsky proves himself an innovator. He writes such daring chords, such bold yet simple and miraculously appropriate sequences,* But he is content to use them at the right moment: he never extends them or repeats them insistently: music for the sake of music did not exist for him. His melody usually offers a somewhat peculiar aspect; it ignores nearly all purely ornamental notes, all cleverly arranged lines, all skilful extension by development, the *arabesque*. But on the contrary, constructed as it usually is by "real" notes of the very rich harmony on which it is founded, or which it implies, it possesses in the highest degree a very concentrated power of evocation. Often it is characterised by more or less ample undulations, symmetrically returning curves, wave-like or simple beats, always plastic

*We may notice to his credit that he never used the harmonic progression "5, 5, 6," pretty but banal, which nearly all his colleagues abused.

and without exaggerated cadences.* We see typical examples of these points on pages 142, 147, 194, etc., of *Boris*.

The tonal feeling with Musorgsky is very free, as free as with the most daring of French composers of to-day, of whom he is the direct forerunner. The licences which he took with " chords " and " modulations " seemed strange to his contemporaries. Cæsar Cui, a faithful friend of the composer, wrote in 1880 : " The harmonies which he uses are nearly always striking and new. And his beautifully gifted nature seems at times, strange as it may seem, to be not absolutely musical. . . . His modulation is too free and one would say at times that it only succeeds by pure chance ; *he does not know how to secure the desirable continuity of part-progression in a harmonized melody*, and the ' parts ' under his pen often assume impossible aspects, contrary to nature, producing harmonies unbearably harsh, in which things seem at sixes and sevens."† ‡

*Except of course for the motives in the folk style which he so often uses.

†" *Vont à vau-l'eau* " in the original quotation.

‡*Music in Russia*, p. 92. This passage reflects exactly enough the opinion which seems to prevail even to-day amongst those cultured Russian musicians who are determined partizans of purism. Singularly M. Cæsar Cui is scarcely less severe on Musorgsky than Tchaikovsky, whose sincere judgment is here given. One can say " sincere " since it is quoted from one of his letters to Mme. Meck, where the composer of the *Pathetic Symphony* speaks openly of all his colleagues : " His gifts are the most remarkable amongst all of them . . . . but he loves the coarse, primitive, ugly . . . . His very original talent always abounds in freakishness. Besides, Tchaikovsky reproaches Lalo with clumsiness *à la Musorgsky*." (Letter to Mme. Meck, November 27th, 1878).

The criticism is severe, but it will not unduly astonish those who know the effect upon the majority of their contemporaries of all innovators in artistic matters. Besides, the criticism is partly justified. We find with Musorgsky examples of clumsy writing, hasty and awkward transitions, even unjustifiable modulations; still this last point is a delicate one: because a change of key is unusual, it does not necessarily follow that it may be useless from an expressive point of view, and one can only appreciate the theoretical value of the statement by reference to the academical rules. But we must make a distinction between what is clumsily done and what is simply free. The reproach which has often been levelled against Musorgsky—that stated in Cæsar Cui's statement to which we have alluded—is that of having renounced the superstition of "real partwriting," in harmonic matters. Chabrier and the most significant of the present-day French musicians are in the same position as Musorgsky in this matter. Whether he has accomplished this through his ignorance of the rules, or whether by deliberately freeing himself from them, as do such cultivated technicians as Debussy and Ravel, is a point of no importance, Musorgsky's innovations, whether they were instinctive or calculated, lose none of their value.*

The attitude which he adopts of an almost absolutely free modality, hardly allows of any

*Musorgsky's most curious harmonic effects are often produced by pedal-notes, simple or multiple, in the bass or in the upper parts.

discussion of the problem of modulation with Musorgsky's music. One feels that in general, there is nothing in his music which clashes with the tonal feeling, because of the pliancy of the cadences, and the extension of the harmonic system of chords. It is true that those critics who are tied to scholastic procedure, will regret that a song beginning in one key finishes in another often very far removed from it. It is not, however, simply neglect with Musorgsky: he knows quite well what he is doing, both when he considers it appropriate to preserve the chief key at the conclusion, and when to end away from it. On the other hand, we are bound to see that there is an inevitable consequence of this principle of minimum stylization which guides him. To prove this, we might quote *Death and the Mother* from the *Songs and Dances of Death* which begins in F sharp minor (with slight alterations) and finishes on a common chord in A minor, on the last syllable pronounced by *Death*: "You see by my song I have lulled him to sleep." This chord finishes the harmonic succession, which accompanies each reply of the apparition. A more traditional musician would have doubtless come to grief there, by adding an instrumental conclusion and a return to the original key. Not to have done so is a sign of genius. One sees the same kind of idea at the end of *The Orphan Beggar Child* already quoted. Musorgsky concluded *Boris Godunoff* for a similar reason by a short simple phrase of which the close scarcely gives a feeling of the tonic, and not at all that of a cadence in the usual sense.

It is beyond doubt that Musorgsky knew how to employ appropriately the strangest modulations, as well as those most usual. As an example of the latter, it will be sufficient to quote the intense effects which he could draw from the most banal of all methods: the change from the minor to the tonic major, see the last part of the *Peasant's Cradle-Song* or in *Eremushka's Cradle-Song*. Nor must we overlook a specimen of the most complete order—the middle section of *To the Mushrooms* with its changes of key, so rough, transitory, remarkable and precise in expression. Musorgsky's technique needs scarcely any further commentary. His orchestration is difficult to describe, so lacking was it in elements that the original orchestral score of *Boris Godunoff* could not be published. We have shown his comparative weakness in writing for the piano,—at any rate in the purely piano pieces. The way in which he treats the voice makes his music formidable for the majority of interpreters; but that is not always in consequence of its awkwardness. There is no doubt that he carefully seeks certain special effects of the vocal registers, probably in his reproduction of the natural intonation, acute or grave as the case requires, perhaps to obtain the true contrast of tone-colour, as for example, when he makes the uproar in *Field-Marshall Death* by the clashing A naturals and G sharps; or when on the other hand he gives the lowest notes to the word "despair" in the *Peasant's Cradle-Song*.

Except perhaps in all that concerns harmony or

rhythm and especially declamation, his technique ought scarcely to detain us. What commands admiration is the artistic result obtained by Musorgsky with the modest means at his disposal. *Boris Godunoff*, that musical drama, more simply and more profoundly human than any other musical drama ever written; *Khovanshchina*, with its calmer beauty and more classic style; the mass of songs, so varied and so powerful, all show that Musorgsky's creative imagination was quick enough to express itself without the help of artificial periphrase. At the basis of Musorgsky's art is genuine truth "at all costs," truth so strong that it is sufficient unto itself.

It seems as if he proceeded with a penetrating clairvoyance. Never has a composer identified himself so closely with the spirit of each of the poems which he treated, never has a composer revealed such an intimacy with their contents. Marvellous as his musical inspirations may be, they never assert themselves at the expense of the poem: they always remain appropriate to the expression. This music, of which the motto is "*Ich dien*"—"I serve!" is as free as the thought itself; it handles, expresses, exalts the most varied characters and sentiments: homely scenes or satirical sketches, scenes of terror, of passion, or of quiet dreaming. It is this artist of genius who expresses in turn the mobile and poetical grace of the child, the resigned or ardent soul of the peasant, with his dreams, his hopes, his good humour, his hates, or his amorous follies. Then

think of the intimacy, the bitterness, the mystery, and the pathos of the *Sunless* suite ; the anguish of the *Songs and Dances of Death* ; and again take such ardent and concentrated pieces as the capricious *The Magpie* and *The Ragamuffin*, and remember that all is effected in the most appropriately direct manner, without a single or ambiguous inflexion. Musorgsky has a way of expressing each sentiment, of characterizing each idea. There is only one way, and that too specific a one to allow of much repetition, for it emanates from a supreme artistic intelligence.

Another singular quality of his work is that the accompaniments acquire an adornment, a texture never attained before and never surpassed. Without having recourse to the complex *triturations* of symphonic development, Musorgsky excels in making a complete musical picture of the piano part of a song, although it is directly associated with the voice, whose autonomy is always respected. The *Trépak* would make an admirable symphonic poem ; the troubled passage from the *Elegy*, apart from the words, would retain a striking evocatory power ; in simpler fashion still, the musical conclusion of the *Peasant's Cradle-Song* opens out infinite horizons. Again, the weak tremolo which accompanies the anguish of the hallucinated Tsar Boris is a masterly discovery, which expresses *all*, by expressing only the essential. And what is most precious in these marvellous pages is that Musorgsky, always a conscientious artist, appeals to the feelings alone, never to the intellect.

These brief considerations can only give a very poor idea of the beauties enfolded in Musorgsky's work, the high significance of his candid, rugged, conscious art. Only a familiar and intimate knowledge of all its moments will reveal its grandeur and attraction. Some will be shocked by the apparent clumsiness, the incorrectness which they will notice here and there; by certain weak pages, even bad ones—which are not by any means the worst which musicians of genius have written. These people are wrong. Perhaps if Musorgsky had been a greater master of his medium, if he had acquired that flexibility of writing, that habit of stylized interpretation, which other composers possessed, he would have been able, whilst preserving his originality and his strength, to have expressed himself better, or to greater advantage; but, considering the facts, one may doubt it—and it matters little. He might have become a Balakireff, a Borodin, a Rimsky-Korsakoff, or even have made a special style of the elements which his generous mind so unwaveringly created, a Debussy, and perhaps he would not have lost by the change. But those, for whom his exceptional personality remains precious, with all his imperfections, revealing an unsuspected art, ought to be content that he jealously preserved his mind from contact with what he believed required alteration. No one more than himself has suffered from the relative inferiority which resulted from this; his obstinacy, in spite of the suggestion of vanity which it discloses, is chiefly the fruit of a noble and

intimate conviction. Creative work was for him a painful effort, on account of the restraints which he imposed upon himself, because he esteemed them necessary for the attainment of his ideal of truth.

Even if one ought not to take into account this proof of his inflexible determination, Musorgsky has expressed this truth powerfully enough to have the right to the ample and impartial admiration of all musicians: his work is so beautiful, and so touching, that it should not only be admired, but *loved* by all.

APPENDIX I.

LIST OF MUSORGSKY'S COMPOSITIONS

Songs

1. *A Child's Song* (Words by Mey), composed 1868, published 1871 by Bessel and Co., Petrograd.
2. *The Orphan Beggar Child* (Words by Musorgsky), composed 1868.
3. *Eremushka's Cradle Song* (Words by Nekarsoff), composed 1868
4. *The Magpie* (Words by Pushkin), composed 1867.
5. *The Ragamuffin* (Words by Musorgsky, from Byron), composed 1867.
6. *King Saul* (Words by Musorgsky, from Byron), composed 1863
7. *Peasant's Cradle Song* (Words by Ostrovsky), composed 1865,
8. *Night Phantasy* (Words by Pushkin and Musorgsky), composed 1864
9. *The Classicist* (Words by Musorgsky), composed 1867, published 1870.
10. *The Musicians' Peepshow*, composed 1867.
11. *The Unlucky One*, composed 1870, published 1871.
12. *Trouble O'ertakes Us* (Words by Tolstoy), composed 1877, published 1882.
13. *The Complaining Soul.*
14. *Conceit*, composed 1877, published 1882.
15. *Behoves It the Brave.*
16. *He is Dejected.*
17. *Vision of Trouble.*
18. *On the Banks of the Don* (Words by Koltsoff), composed 1867, published 1883.

19. *The Dniépr* (Words by Chevtchenko), composed 1866, revised 1880.
20. *Song of the Flea* (from Goethe's *Faust*). Russian translation by Strugovchtchikoff, composed 1879, published 1883.
21. *Kallistrate* (Words by Nekrassoff), composed 1864, published 1883.
22. *The Wanderer* (Words by Plechtcheef), composed 1879, published 1883.
23. *Sunless*, a cycle of six songs. (Words by Golenistcheff-Kutusoff), composed 1874, published 1874.
    (*a*) " Within Four Walls "
    (*b*) " Thine Eyes in the Crowd now Avoid Me "
    (*c*) " All Past the Feast Days "
    (*d*) " Alas, it is my Lonely Fate "
    (*e*) " Elegy "
    (*f*) " On the River."
    Published in the same year by Bessel.
24. *In the Nursery* (*Chansons Enfantines*). Seven songs (Words by Musorgsky). Written and published at various times,
    (*a*) " With Nanny "
    (*b*) " Go Into the Corner "
    (*c*) " The Cockchafer "
    (*d*) " Dolly's Cradle Song "
    (*e*) " The Evening Prayer "
    (*f*) " The Hobby Horse "
    (*g*) " The Cat and the Bird-Cage (" Mimi the Brigand.")
25. *Songs and Dances of Death.* Four songs (Words by Golenistcheff-Kutusoff), composed 1875-7, published 1882,
    (*a*) *Trépak*, " Death and the Peasant "
    (*b*) *Cradle Song*, " The Infant Breathes Softly "
    (*c*) *Death the Serenader*, " Soft is the Night "
    (*d*) *Field-Marshal Death*, " War Rumbles."
26. *The Seminarist* (Words by Musorgsky), composed 1866, published 1870 by Belaieff.

27. *Tell Me Why* (Words by Pushkin), composed 1858, published 1867.
28. *O, My Savishna* (Words by Musorgsky), composed 1865.
29. *Hopak* (Words by Mey, after Chevtchenko), composed 1866.
30. *Hebrew Song* (Words by Mey, after *The Song of Songs*), composed 1867, published 1868.
31. *To the Mushrooms* (Words by Mey), composed 1867.
32. *The Banquet* (Words by Koltsoff), composed in 1867.
33. *The Goat* (Words by Musorgsky), composed 1867.
34. *Left Behind* (Words by Golenistcheff-Kutusoff), composed 1874, published about 1882, by Guthail, of Moscow.
35. *The Unsolvable* (Words by Musorgsky), composed 1875, published 1910, by Bessel.

Choral Works

36. *The Defeat of Sennacherib.* For mixed choir (Words after Byron), composed 1867, re-written in 1874, published by Belaieff.
37. *Joshua* (Yissuss Navin). Mixed choir and solo voice (Words by Musorgsky), composed 1877, published 1883 by Bessel.
38. *Œdipus Rex.* Mixed choir, composed 1860, published about 1880.
39. *Salammbo.* Female voices, composed 1866, published 1884.
40. *Four Short Choruses* for unaccompanied male voices (transcriptions of popular airs), published by Jurgenson, 1895.

Operas

41. *Boris Godunoff.* Opera libretto by Pushkin and Musorgsky, composed between 1868 and 1871, published 1875 by Bessel.

42. *Khovanshchina.* Musical drama ; libretto by Musorgsky begun in 1872, published in 1882, revised by Rimsky-Korsakoff.
43. *The Marriage-Broker.* Musical comedy, one act, libretto by Gogul, composed 1868, published 1908.
44. *The Fair of Sorotchinsk* (fragmentary), libretto after Gogol ; composition commenced in 1877, published in 1904.

Orchestral Music

45. *Scherzo in B Minor.* Composed 1858, published by Bessel.
46. *Intermezzo.* Composed 1867, arranged for piano solo in 1861.
47. *Turkish March.* Composed 1880, extracted from the music for *Mlada.*
48. *A Night on the Bare Mountain.* Composed 1867-1875. In its present form the piece has been re-orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakoff.

Piano Music

49. *Ensigns' Polka.* Composed 1852 ; published in same year by Bernard ; no longer obtainable.
50. *Children's Play.* Composed in 1859, published in 1875 by Belaieff.
51. *Intermezzo.* Composed in 1861, published 1873 ; see also orchestral music.
52. *Pictures from an Exhibition* (Suite). Composed 1874, arranged for orchestra by M. Tuchmaloff.
53. *Meditation.* First published by Jurgenson.
54. *A Tear.*
55. *The Sempstress.*
56. *In the Crimea. Capriccio ;* composed 1879.
57. *In the Crimea. At Hursoff.*
58. *In the Village.*

59. *Hopak.* Composed about 1877, published by Bessel. This was intended for the score of *The Fair of Sorotchinsk.* It has been orchestrated by M. Liadoff.

UNPUBLISHED WORKS (*See note on following page*)

60. *Scherzo in C Sharp Minor,* for orchestra ; composed 1858.
61. *Impromptu Appassionata,* for piano ; composed 1859.
62. *Prelude in an Old Mode,* for piano ; composed 1861.
63. *Impromptu,* for piano.
64. *Minuetto.* The titles of these last three are given by Musorgsky himself, but no further traces of them are to be found.
65. *The Beggar.* Song to Goethe's words : composed 1863. This figures in the MS of Mr. Malherbe.
66. *Remembrance of Childhood.* For piano ; composed 1857.
67. *Nania and Me : First Punishment.* For piano ; composed 1865.
68. *Allegro.* For a symphony ; scored for piano, four hands ; quoted by Balakireff as lost.
69. *March for the 25th Anniversary of the Accession of Alexander II.* Composed 1880 for orchestra, quoted by Mr. D'Alheim as having been written for a competition.
70. *Longing.* Song to Heine's words ; composed 1866.

Supplementary Note

The catalogue of unpublished works has been considerably lengthened since the first edition of this book, and even now cannot be considered as complete. Mr. Charles Malherbe acquired in 1909 an important autograph volume containing eleven unpublished songs, with titles, as follows :—

My Star	(1857)
Instant Joy	(1858)
The Wind is Moaning	(1858)
I am Rich in the Palace	(1865)
Prayer	(1865)
Why these Words of Love?	(1860)
The Wind Blows	(1864)
Now We are Parted	(1863)
The Child	(1866)
The Song of the Old Man	(1863)
The Accursed	(1865)

The *Song of Balearus,* from *Salammbo,* a duet in the Italian style, and some widely different versions from those already existing, of *King Saul, Night,* and the *Peasant's Cradle Song.* Other works—a scene from *Salammbo,* a song of 1875, *The Unsolvable*—are unpublished, and a number of MSS deposited in the Imperial Library at Petrograd, are not accessible. Finally, certain collectors, like Mr. Findaisen, possess some unpublished texts. It is to be hoped that all this music of Musorgsky will appear as soon as possible. The unjustifiable neglect of this master should have been atoned for long ago.

APPENDIX II.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Since Calvocoressi's able work on Musorgsky first appeared, a large quantity of his music has been published in England. Messrs. Augener, Conduit Street, W., publish the following songs to English words:

1. *In the Nursery* (*Chansons Enfantines*). (English translation by Miss E. M. Lockwood)
2. *Sunless.* Six songs. (English translation by A. Eaglefield, Hull)
3. *Hopak.* Song with piano accompaniment. (English words by Miss E. M. Lockwood).
4. *Six Songs.* (English words by Mme. Marie Rosing,) "The Soul," "Trépak," "O, My Savishna," "Invocation to the Dniepr," "Eremushka's Cradle Song," "Song of a Young Villager" (from the *Fair of Sorotchinsk*).

The same firm also publish a large number of his pianoforte pieces, as follows:

"Pictures from an Exhibition" (*Tableaux de l'Exhibition*).
"Promenade."
"The Gnome."
"The Old Castle."
"In the Tuilieries" (children playing and quarrelling).
"A Polish Chariot," (*Bydlo*).
"Ballet of Chickens in their Shells."
"Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuile,"
"The Market Place at Limoges."
"In the Catacombs."

"The Hut Supported by Chickens' Legs," (design for a clock).
"The Gate of the Bohatyrs at Kieff."

A Sketch Book for Piano, containing six pieces :
"In the Crimea. At Hursoff."
"Meditation."
"Scherzino : La Couturière."
"In the Crimea."
"In the Village."
"Hopak."

Hopak for Piano, (Edited by Thomas F. Dunhill).

Intermezzo for Piano, (Edited by Thomas F. Dunhill).

Kieff Processional for Organ. This is a free transcription of the Gate of the Bohatyrs at Kieff, and is a fine piece of gorgeous colouring. It makes use of two ancient church chants.

The Russian Organ Album, published by Messrs. Augener, in 1915, contains three pieces by Musorgsky.

Messrs. J. and W. Chester publish the following of Musorgsky's songs and lyric scenes with pianoforte accompaniment, as revised by A. Rimsky-Korsakoff, with English version by Rosa Newmarch :

Songs and Dances of Death :

Trépak, "Still is the Forest,"
For baritone or mezze-soprano ; the same for tenor or soprano ; the same for baritone, with orchestral accompaniment by Glazunoff.

Cradle Song, "Faint Sounds of Moaning,"
For contralto ; the same for soprano.

Serenade, "Magical Tender Night,"
For mezzo-soprano or baritone ; the same for soprano or tenor ; the same for baritone with orchestral accompaniment by Rimsky-Korsakoff.

Field-Marshal Death, "The Battle Rages,"
For tenor; the same for bass; the same for baritone; the same for tenor with orchestral accompaniment, by Rimsky-Korsakoff.

Three Songs and Lyric Scenes:

Eremushka's Cradle Song, "Hush-a-Bye,"
For contralto.

The Musician's Puppet-Show, "Walk Up, Please, and See the Show,"
For baritone or bass.

The Song of Mephistopheles, "Once, Long Ago, a King Lived." For baritone or bass.

Mrs. Rosa Newmarch has made a study of Musorgsky's Operas in *The Russian Opera,* (Herbert Jenkins, Ltd.) 1914.

APPENDIX III.

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M. Olenin d'Alheim, *Le Legs de Musorgsky*, Paris, 1908.

A. Pougin, *La Musique*, (in Russian), 12mo., 1904, Paris.

A. Soubies, *La Musique*, (in Russian), 8vo., no date, Paris.

W. Stassoff, *Musorgsky*, (in Russian), in three volumes in 4to., 1896, Petrograd.

Trifonoff, *Musorgsky*, (in Russian), European Messenger, Petrograd, December, 1893.

Of these works, that of Stassoff, which utilises all the biographical materials found up to the present, remains the most important. It is rendered thoroughly complete by the addition of several articles brought together under the same cover. The picturesque and enthusiastic study by Mr. d'Alheim is also recommended, and it has done much for the furtherance of a knowledge of Musorgsky's music.

The author tenders his best thanks to Mr. Mily Balakireff for so readily communicating his personal remembrances of Musorgsky ; and also to the publishers, whose ready courtesy has greatly facilitated the preparation of the present work.

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